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TENNYSON
IDYLLS OF THE KING

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TENNYSON

IDYLLS OF THE KING

THE COMING OF ARTHUR LANCELOT AND ELAINE
GARETH AND LYNETTE THE PASSING OF ARTHUR

WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES BY

H. W. BOYNTON

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THE IDYLLS OF THE KING.

IT is not known how early the legends of Arthur began to take form, nor how much foundation they had in fact. We first hear of them in Brittany, where, as they were passed down from generation to generation of Celts, they retained a pretty simple form. Arthur, the story ran, was a brave British king, who had a hand in the expulsion of the last Romans from Britain, and ruled wisely thereafter for many years. After the Norman Conquest of England, these legends were brought from Brittany to Wales, where they became common property. In 1147, Geoffrey of Monmouth, a Welsh priest in the court of Henry I, included the substance of them, with additions of his own, in his Latin prose *History of the Kings of Britain*. Wace, a Norman *trouvreur*, rendered the legend in Norman French soon after; and from his narrative Layamon, a Saxon priest, transferred it to English verse. The situation is strange and suggestive: a Saxon tells, in the alliterative verse of his Teutonic inheritance, a story of the ancient Britons, which he has heard from a Norman, who gained it from a Latin work by a Welshman. Of such racial interweaving the fabric of modern English literature is made.

Another notable writer of Layamon's period also illustrates the composite character of English blood and English letters in that day. William of Malmesbury was son of a Norman father and a Saxon mother. Like many other writers of his century, he produced various narratives in Latin dealing with English history. One of them is of more

than ordinary interest, as it suggests the germ of an idea which was about to possess the imagination of a whole race of singers and sayers: The Story of the Grail. According to this story, Joseph of Arimathea, in the course of his wanderings, had founded at Glastonbury the first church in England. With him was brought the Grail, the mystic vessel which had been used at the Last Supper, and in which the blood of Christ had been caught. Now, it chanced that, according to tradition, Joseph of Arimathea and King Arthur were both buried at Glastonbury; and it may have been this coincidence which, working upon the imagination of another ecclesiastic, Walter Map, linked the name of Arthur to the story of the Grail. The result was a romance in Norman French prose, called *The Quest of the Grail*.

To understand the amazing influence which the Grail legend had upon subsequent English poetry and prose, we must take it not as a chance product of the fancy, but as embodying the spirit of an age. During the twelfth century Europe was shaken by the two great passions for religion and for chivalry. The Norman had no match in his devotion to either of these passions; no wonder that he found an outlet for them both in that form of religious adventure, the Crusade. It is the crusading spirit in its purest form — the dream of gaining an ideal by hard blows — which animates the story of Walter Map. The same spirit produced in France the *Chansons de Geste*, dealing with Charlemagne; and in Spain, *The Cid*.

From such sources Sir Thomas Malory derived his version of the Arthurian story, *Le Morte Darthur*; it was written in the fifteenth century and printed by Caxton. This really great prose narrative, which has been reprinted several times of late, gained in its own day a very wide reading. Mainly from Malory, Tennyson drew the materials for the

Idylls; but he employed these materials very differently. King Arthur, for instance, becomes in Tennyson a theoretically perfect creature, whose failure is due to adverse circumstances; while in Malory he is an heroic but fallible human being, who is in the end undone by the consequence of his own half-forgotten sin. Tennyson has, in short, simply selected and adopted such elements of the legend as he could employ in expressing his creed of modern idealism.

His method of developing the theme was extraordinary. *The Lady of Shalott*, a prefiguring of the story of *Elaine*, was written as early as 1832; the brief poems, *Sir Galahad*, *Sir Lancelot and Guinevere*, and *Morte d'Arthur*, appeared ten years later. *Morte d'Arthur* gave the first suggestion of epical treatment, and the substance of it was embodied in the *The Passing of Arthur*, in the final version of the *Idylls*. The list of poems composing that complete version is worth giving, as there are many incomplete editions to be had. They are prefaced in the English editions by a dedication to the memory of Prince Albert, and followed by an address to Queen Victoria. Of the *Idylls* themselves there are twelve:—

- (1) The Coming of Arthur.
- (2) Gareth and Lynette.
- (3) The Marriage of Geraint.
- (4) Geraint and Enid. —
- (5) Balin and Balan.
- (6) Merlin and Vivien. —
- (7) Lancelot and Elaine.
- (8) The Holy Grail.
- (9) Pelleas and Ettarre.
- (10) The Last Tournament. —
- (11) Guinevere. —
- (12) The Passing of Arthur.

In this order, as they are now printed, they constitute a fairly well connected series of legends dealing with Arthur. They were, however, written at irregular intervals, extending altogether over a span of about twenty-seven years. In 1859 appeared a volume called *Idylls of the King*, containing what are now the third, fourth, sixth, seventh, and eleventh idylls. In 1870 appeared the first, eighth, ninth, and twelfth. Two years later appeared the second and tenth parts, and in 1885 appeared the fifth part. It is, as Henry van Dyke has remarked, an odd thing "that he should begin with the end, and continue with the beginning, and end with the middle of the story"; but the detached character of the parts, each complete in itself, made this manner of development not unnatural.

In the notes to the present edition of four of the *Idylls*, frequent quotations are made from Malory. They are not historically accurate, but represent the older version of the story from which Tennyson drew his materials. As will be seen, he made a very free use of them. The quotations are from the Temple Classics edition of *Le Morte Darthur*.

H. W. B.

ANDOVER, November, 1903.

IDYLLS OF THE KING.



THE COMING OF ARTHUR.

LEODOGRAN, the King of Cameliard,
Had one fair daughter, and none other child;
And she was fairest of all flesh on earth,
Guinevere, and in her his one delight.

For many a petty king ere Arthur came 5
Ruled in this isle, and ever waging war
Each upon other, wasted all the land;
And still from time to time the heathen host
Swarm'd overseas, and harried what was left.
And so there grew great tracts of wilderness, 10
Wherein the beast was ever more and more,
But man was less and less, till Arthur came.
For first Aurelius lived and fought and died,
And after him King Uther fought and died,
But either fail'd to make the kingdom one. 15
And after these King Arthur for a space,
And thro' the puissance of his Table Round,
Drew all their petty principdoms under him,
Their king and head, and made a realm, and reign'd.

And thus the land of Cameliard was waste, 20
Thick with wet woods, and many a beast therein,
And none or few to scare or chase the beast;
So that wild dog, and wolf and boar and bear

Came night and day, and rooted in the fields,
 And wallow'd in the gardens of the King. 25
 And ever and anon the wolf would steal
 The children and devour, but now and then,
 Her own brood lost or dead, lent her fierce teat
 To human sucklings; and the children, housed
 In her foul den, there at their meat would growl, 30
 And mock their foster-mother on four feet,
 Till, straighten'd, they grew up to wolf-like men,
 Worse than the wolves. And King Leodogran
 Groan'd for the Roman legions here again,
 And Caesar's eagle: then his brother king, 35
 Urien, assail'd him: last a heathen horde,
 Reddening the sun with smoke and earth with blood,
 And on the spike that split the mother's heart
 Spitting the child, brake on him, till, amazed,
 He knew not whither he should turn for aid. 40

But — for he heard of Arthur newly crown'd,
 Tho' not without an uproar made by those
 Who cried, 'He is not Uther's son' — the King
 Sent to him, saying, 'Arise, and help us thou!
 For here between the man and beast we die.' 45

And Arthur yet had done no deed of arms,
 But heard the call, and came: and Guinevere
 Stood by the castle walls to watch him pass;
 But since he neither wore on helm or shield
 The golden symbol of his kinglihood, 50
 But rode a simple knight among his knights,
 And many of these in richer arms than he,
 She saw him not, or mark'd not, if she saw,
 One among many, tho' his face was bare.

But Arthur, looking downward as he pass'd, 55
Felt the light of her eyes into his life
Smite on the sudden, yet rode on, and pitch'd
His tents beside the forest. Then he drave
The heathen ; after, slew the beast, and fell'd
The forest, letting in the sun, and made 60
Broad pathways for the hunter and the knight,
And so return'd.

For while he linger'd there,
A doubt that ever smoulder'd in the hearts
Of those great Lords and Barons of his realm
Flash'd forth and into war : for most of these, 65
Colleaguings with a score of petty kings,
Made head against him, crying, ' Who is he
That he should rule us ? ' who hath proven him
King Uther's son ? for lo ! we look at him,
And find nor face nor bearing, limbs nor voice, 70
Are like to those of Uther whom we knew.
This is the son of Gorlois, not the King ;
This is the son of Anton, not the King.'

And Arthur, passing thence to battle, felt
Travail, and throes and agonies of the life, 75
Desiring to be join'd with Guinevere ;
And thinking as he rode, ' Her father said
That there between the man and beast they die.
Shall I not lift her from this land of beasts
Up to my throne, and side by side with me ? 80
What happiness to reign a lonely king,
Vex'd — O ye stars that shudder over me,
O earth that soundest hollow under me,
Vex'd with waste dreams ? for saving I be join'd

To her that is the fairest under heaven, 85
 I seem as nothing in the mighty world,
 And cannot will my will, nor work my work
 Wholly, nor make myself in mine own realm
 Victor and lord. But were I join'd with her,
 Then might we live together as one life, 90
 And reigning with one will in everything
 Have power on this dark land to lighten it,
 And power on this dead world to make it live.'

Thereafter — as he speaks who tells the tale —
 When Arthur reach'd a field-of-battle bright 95
 With pitch'd pavilions of his foe, the world
 Was all so clear about him, that he saw
 The smallest rock far on the faintest hill,
 And even in high day the morning star.
 So when the King had set his banner broad, 100
 At once from either side, with trumpet-blast,
 And shouts, and clarions shrilling unto blood,
 The long-lanced battle let their horses run.
 And now the Barons and the kings prevail'd,
 And now the King, as here and there that war 105
 Went swaying; but the Powers who walk the world
 Made lightnings and great thunders over him,
 And dazed all eyes, till Arthur by main might,
 And mightier of his hands with every blow,
 And leading all his knighthood, threw the Kings 110
 Carados, Urien, Cradlemon of Wales,
 Claudias, and Clariance of Northumberland,
 The King Brandagoras of Latangor,
 With Anguisant of Erin, Morganore,
 And Lot of Orkney. Then, before a voice 115
 As dreadful as the shout of one who sees

To one who sins, and deems himself alone
 And all the world asleep, they swerved and brake
 Flying, and Arthur call'd to stay the brands
 That hack'd among the flyers, 'Ho! they yield!' 120
 So like a painted battle the war stood
 Silenced, the living quiet as the dead,
 And in the heart of Arthur joy was lord.
 He laugh'd upon his warrior whom he loved
 And honor'd most. 'Thou dost not doubt me King, 125
 So well thine arm hath wrought for me to-day.'
 'Sir and my liege,' he cried, 'the fire of God
 Descends upon thee in the battle-field;
 I know thee for my King!' Whereat the two,
 For each had warded either in the fight, 130
 Sware on the field of death a deathless love.
 And Arthur said, 'Man's word is God in man:
 Let chance what will, I trust thee to the death.'

Then quickly from the foughten field he sent
 Ulfus, and Brastias, and Bedivere, 135
 His new-made knights, to King Leodogran,
 Saying, 'If I in aught have served thee well,
 Give me thy daughter Guinevere to wife.'

Whom when he heard, Leodogran in heart
 Debating — 'How should I that am a king, 140
 However much he help me at my need,
 Give my one daughter saving to a king,
 And a king's son?' — lifted his voice, and call'd
 A hoary man, his chamberlain, to whom
 He trusted all things, and of him required 145
 His counsel: 'Knowest thou aught of Arthur's birth?'

Then spake the hoary chamberlain and said,
 ‘Sir King, there be but two old men that know :
 And each is twice as old as I ; and one
 Is Merlin, the wise man that ever served 150
 King Uther thro’ his magic art : and one
 Is Merlin’s master (so they call him) Bleys,
 Who taught him magic : but the scholar ran
 Before the master, and so far, that Bleys
 Laid magic by, and sat him down, and wrote 155
 All things and whatsoever Merlin did
 In one great annal-book, where after-years
 Will learn the secret of our Arthur’s birth.’

To whom the King Leodogran replied, *et cetera*
 ‘O friend, had I been holpen half as well 160
 By this King Arthur as by thee to-day,
 Then beast and man had had their share of me :
 But summon here before us yet once more
 Ulfus, and Brastias, and Bedivere.’

Then, when they came before him, the King said 165
 ‘I have seen the cuckoo chased by lesser fowl,
 And reason in the chase ; but wherefore now
 Do these your lords stir up the heat of war,
 Some calling Arthur born of Gorloïs,
 Others of Anton ? Tell me, ye yourselves, 170
 Hold ye this Arthur for King Uther’s son ?’

And Ulfus and Brastias answer’d, ‘Ay.’
 Then Bedivere, the first of all his knights
 Knighted by Arthur at his crowning, spake—
 For bold in heart and act and word was he, 175
 Whenever slander breathed against the King—

‘Sir, there be many rumors on this head :
For there be those who hate him in their hearts,
Call him baseborn, and since his ways are sweet,
And theirs are bestial, hold him less than man, 180
And there be those who deem him more than man,
And dream he dropp’d from heaven ; but my belief
In all this matter — so ye care to learn —
Sir, for ye know that in King Uther’s time
The prince and warrior Gorloïs, he that held 185
Tintagil castle by the Cornish sea,
Was wedded with a winsome wife, Ygerne :
And daughters had she borne him, — one whereof,
Lot’s wife, the Queen of Orkney, Bellicent,
Hath ever like a royal sister cleaved 190
To Arthur, — but a son she had not borne.
And Uther cast upon her eyes of love :
But she, a stainless wife to Gorloïs,
So loathed the bright dishonor of his love,
That Gorloïs and King Uther went to war : 195
And overthrown was Gorloïs and slain.
Then Uther in his wrath and heat besieged
Ygerne within Tintagil, where her men,
Seeing the mighty swarm about their walls,
Left her and fled, and Uther enter’d in, 200
And there was none to call to but himself.
So compass’d by the power of the King,
Enforced she was to wed him in her tears,
And with a shameful swiftness : afterward,
Not many moons, King Uther died himself, 205
Moaning and wailing for an heir to rule
After him, lest the realm should go to wrack.
And that same night, the night of the new year,
By reason of the bitterness and grief

That vex'd his mother, all before his time 210
 Was Arthur born, and all as soon as born
 Deliver'd at a secret postern-gate
 To Merlin, to be holden far apart
 Until his hour should come; because the lords
 Of that fierce day were as the lords of this, 215
 Wild beasts, and surely would have torn the child
 Piecemeal among them, had they known; for each
 But sought to rule for his own self and hand,
 And many hated Uther for the sake
 Of Gorlois. Wherefore Merlin took the child, 220
 And gave him to Sir Anton, an old knight
 And ancient friend of Uther, and his wife
 Nursed the young prince, and reared him with her own;
 And no man knew. And ever since the lords
 Have foughten like wild beasts among themselves, 225
 So that the realm has gone to wrack: but now,
 This year, when Merlin (for his hour had come)
 Brought Arthur forth, and set him in the hall,
 Proclaiming, "Here is Uther's heir, your king,"
 A hundred voices cried, "Away with him! 230
 No king of ours! a son of Gorlois he,
 Or else the child of Anton, and no king,
 Or else baseborn." Yet Merlin thro' his craft,
 And while the people clamor'd for a king,
 Had Arthur crown'd: but after, the great lords 235
 Banded, and so brake out in open war.'

Then while the King debated with himself
 If Arthur were the child of shamefulness,
 Or born the son of Gorlois, after death,
 Or Uther's son, and born before his time, 240
 Or whether there were truth in anything

Said by these three, there came to Cameliard,
With Gawain and young Modred, her two sons,
Lot's wife, the Queen of Orkney, Bellicent ;
Whom as he could, not as he would, the King 245
Made feast for, saying, as they sat at meat,

‘A doubtful throne is ice on summer seas.
Ye come from Arthur's court. Victor his men
Report him ! Yea, but ye — think ye this king —
So many those that hate him, and so strong, 250
So few his knights, however brave they be —
Hath body enow to hold his foemen down ?’

‘O King,’ she cried, ‘and I will tell thee: few,
Few, but all brave, all of one mind with him ;
For I was near him when the savage yells 255
Of Uther's peerage died, and Arthur sat
Crown'd on the dais, and his warriors cried,
“Be thou the king, and we will work thy will
Who love thee.” Then the King in low deep tones,
And simple words of great authority, 260
Bound them by so strait vows to his own self,
That when they rose, knighted from kneeling, some
Were pale as at the passing of a ghost,
Some flush'd, and others dazed, as one who wakes
Half-blinded at the coming of a light. 265

‘But when he spake and cheer'd his Table Round
With large, divine, and comfortable words
Beyond my tongue to tell thee — I beheld
From eye to eye thro' all their Order flash
A momentary likeness of the King: 270
And ere it left their faces, thro' the cross

And those around it and the Crucified,
Down from the casement over Arthur, smote
Flame-color, vert and azure, in three rays,
One falling upon each of three fair queens, 275
Who stood in silence near his throne, the friends
Of Arthur, gazing on him, tall, with bright
Sweet faces, who will help him at his need.

‘ And there I saw mage Merlin, whose vast wit
And hundred winters are but as the hands 280
Of loyal vassals toiling for their liege.

‘ And near him stood the Lady of the Lake,
Who knows a subtler magic than his own —
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful.
She gave the King his huge cross-hilted sword, 285
Whereby to drive the heathen out: a mist
Of incense curl’d about her, and her face
Wellnigh was hidden in the minster gloom :
But there was heard among the holy hymns
A voice as of the waters, for she dwells 290
Down in a deep ; calm, whatsoever storms
May shake the world, and when the surface rolls,
Hath power to walk the waters like our Lord.

‘ There likewise I beheld Excalibur
Before him at his crowning borne, the sword 295
That rose from out the bosom of the lake,
And Arthur row’d across and took it — rich
With jewels, elfin Urim, on the hilt,
Bewildering heart and eye — the blade so bright
That men are blinded by it — on one side, 300
Graven in the oldest tongue of all this world,

"Take me," but turn the blade and ye shall see,
 And written in the speech ye speak yourself,
 "Cast me away!" And sad was Arthur's face
 Taking it, but old Merlin counsell'd him, 305
 "Take thou and strike! the time to cast away
 Is yet far-off." So this great brand the king
 Took, and by this will beat his foemen down.'

Thereat Leodogran rejoiced, but thought
 To sift his doubtings to the last, and ask'd, 310
 Fixing full eyes of question on her face,
 'The swallow and the swift are near akin,
 But thou art closer to this noble prince,
 Being his own dear sister;' and she said,
 'Daughter of Gorloïs and Ygerne am I;' 315
 'And therefore Arthur's sister?' ask'd the King.
 She answered, 'These be secret things,' and sign'd
 To those two sons to pass and let them be.
 And Gawain went, and breaking into song
 Sprang out, and follow'd by his flying hair 320
 Ran like a colt, and leapt at all he saw:
 But Modred laid his ear beside the doors,
 And there half-heard; the same that afterward
 Struck for the throne, and striking found his doom.

And then the Queen made answer, 'What know I? 325
 For dark my mother was in eyes and hair,
 And dark in hair and eyes am I; and dark
 Was Gorloïs, yea and dark was Uther too,
 Wellnigh to blackness: but this King is fair
 Beyond the race of Britons and of men. 330
 Moreover, always in my mind I hear
 A cry from out the dawning of my life,

A mother weeping, and I hear her say,
 "O that ye had some brother, pretty one,
 To guard thee on the rough ways of the world." ' 335

'Ay,' said the King, 'and hear ye such a cry?
 But when did Arthur chance upon thee first?'

'O King,' she cried, 'and I will tell thee true;
 He found me first when yet a little maid:
 Beaten I had been for a little fault 340
 Whereof I was not guilty; and out I ran
 And flung myself down on a bank of heath,
 And hated this fair world and all therein,
 And wept, and wish'd that I were dead; and he—
 I know not whether of himself he came, 345
 Or brought by Merlin, who, they say, can walk
 Unseen at pleasure—he was at my side
 And spake sweet words, and comforted my heart,
 And dried my tears, being a child with me.
 And many a time he came, and evermore 350
 As I grew greater, grew with me; and sad
 At times he seem'd, and sad with him was I,
 Stern too at times, and then I loved him not,
 But sweet again, and then I loved him well.
 But now of late I see him less and less, 355
 But those first days had golden hours for me,
 For then I surely thought he would be king.

'But let me tell thee now another tale:
 For Bleys, our Merlin's master, as they say,
 Died but of late, and sent his cry to me, 360
 To hear him speak before he left his life.
 Shrunk like a fairy changeling lay the mage;
 And when I enter'd told me that himself

And Merlin ever served about the King,
Uther, before he died; and on the night 365
When Uther in Tintagil past away
Moaning and wailing for an heir, the two
Left the still King, and passing forth to breathe,
Then from the castle gateway by the chasm
Descending thro' the dismal night — a night 370
In which the bounds of heaven and earth were lost —
Beheld, so high upon the dreary deeps
It seem'd in heaven, a ship, the shape thereof
A dragon wing'd, and all from stem to stern
Bright with a shining people on the decks, 375
And gone as soon as seen. And then the two
Dropp'd to the cove, and watch'd the great sea fall,
Wave after wave, each mightier than the last,
Till last, a ninth one, gathering half the deep
And full of voices, slowly rose and plunged 380
Roaring, and all the wave was in a flame:
And down the wave and in the flame was borne
A naked babe, and rode to Merlin's feet,
Who stoop'd and caught the babe, and cried "The King!
Here is an heir for Uther!" and the fringe 385
Of that great breaker, sweeping up the strand,
Lash'd at the wizard as he spake the word,
And all at once all round him rose in fire,
So that the child and he were clothed in fire.
And presently thereafter follow'd calm, 390
Free sky and stars: "And this same child," he said,
"Is he who reigns; nor could I part in peace
Till this were told." And saying this the seer
Went thro' the strait and dreadful pass of death,
Not ever to be question'd any more 395
Save on the further side; but when I met

Merlin, and ask'd him if these things were truth —
The shining dragon and the naked child
Descending in the glory of the seas —
He laugh'd as is his wont, and answer'd me
In riddling triplets of old time, and said : —

400

“ Rain, rain, and sun ! a rainbow in the sky !
A young man will be wiser by and by ;
An old man's wit may wander ere he die.

Rain, rain, and sun ! a rainbow on the lea !
And truth is this to me, and that to thee ;
And truth or clothed or naked let it be.

405

Rain, sun, and rain ! and the free blossom blows :
Sun, rain, and sun ! and where is he who knows ?
From the great deep to the great deep he goes.”

410

‘ So Merlin riddling anger'd me ; but thou
Fear not to give this King thine only child,
Guinevere : so great bards of him will sing
Hereafter ; and dark sayings from of old
Ranging and ringing thro' the minds of men,
And echoed by old folk beside their fires
For comfort after their wage-work is done,
Speak of the King ; and Merlin in our time
Hath spoken also, not in jest, and sworn
Tho' men may wound him that he will not die
But pass, again to come ; and then or now
Utterly smite the heathen underfoot,
Till these and all men hail him for their king.’

415

420

She spake and King Leodogran rejoiced,
But musing ‘ Shall I answer yea or nay ? ’
Doubted, and drowsed, nodded and slept, and saw,
Dreaming, a slope of land that ever grew,

425

Field after field, up to a height, the peak
Haze-hidden, and thereon a phantom king,
Now looming, and now lost ; and on the slope 430
The sword rose, the hind fell, the herd was driven,
Fire glimpsed ; and all the land from roof and rick,
In drifts of smoke before a rolling wind,
Stream'd to the peak, and mingled with the haze
And made it thicker ; while the phantom king 435
Sent out at times a voice ; and here or there
Stood one who pointed toward the voice, the rest
Slew on and burnt, crying, ' No king of ours,
No son of Uther, and no king of ours ; '
Till with a wink his dream was changed, the haze 440
Descended, and the solid earth became
As nothing, but the King stood out in heaven,
Crown'd. And Leodogran awoke, and sent
Ulfus, and Brastias and Bedivere,
Back to the court of Arthur answering yea. 445

Then Arthur charged his warrior whom he loved
And honor'd most, Sir Lancelot, to ride forth
And bring the Queen ; — and watch'd him from the gates :
And Lancelot pass'd away among the flowers,
(For then was latter April) and return'd 450
Among the flowers, in May, with Guinevere.
To whom arrived, by Dubric the high saint,
Chief of the church in Britain, and before
The stateliest of her altar-shrines, the King
That morn was married, while in stainless white 455
The fair beginners of a nobler time,
And glorying in their vows and him, his knights
Stood round him, and rejoicing in his joy.
Far shone the fields of May thro' open door,

The sacred altar blossom'd white with May, 460
 The Sun of May descended on their King,
 They gazed on all earth's beauty in their Queen,
 Roll'd incense, and there pass'd along the hymns
 A voice as of the waters, while the two
 Sware at the shrine of Christ a deathless love: 465
 And Arthur said, 'Behold, thy doom is mine.
 Let chance what will, I love thee to the death!'
 To whom the Queen replied with drooping eyes,
 'King and my lord, I love thee to the death!'
 And holy Dubric spread his hands and spake, 470
 'Reign ye, and live and love, and make the world
 Other, and may thy Queen be one with thee,
 And all this Order of thy Table Round
 Fulfil the boundless purpose of their King:'

So Dubric said; but when they left the shrine 475
 Great Lords from Rome before the portal stood,
 In scornful stillness gazing as they pass'd;
 Then while they paced a city all on fire
 With sun and cloth of gold, the trumpets blew,
 And Arthur's knighthood sang before the King: — 480

• Blow trumpet, for the world is white with May;
 Blow trumpet, the long night hath roll'd away!
 Blow thro' the living world — "Let the King reign."

• Shall Rome or Heathen rule in Arthur's realm?
 Flash brand and lance, fall battleaxe upon helm, 485
 Fall battleaxe, and flash brand! Let the King reign.

• Strike for the King and live! his knights have heard
 That God hath told the King a secret word.
 Fall battleaxe, and flash brand! Let the King reign.

‘Blow trumpet! he will lift us from the dust. 490
Blow trumpet! live the strength and die the lust!
Clang battleaxe, and clash brand! Let the King reign.

‘Strike for the King and die! and if thou diest,
The King is King, and ever wills the highest.
Clang battleaxe, and clash brand! Let the King reign. 495

‘Blow, for our Sun is mighty in his May!
Blow, for our Sun is mightier day by day!
Clang battleaxe, and clash brand! Let the King reign.

‘The King will follow Christ, and we the King
In whom high God hath breathed a secret thing. 500
Fall battleaxe, and flash brand! Let the King reign.’

So sang the knighthood, moving to their hall.
There at the banquet those great Lords from Rome,
The slowly-fading mistress of the world,
Strode in, and claim’d their tribute as of yore. 505
But Arthur spake, ‘Behold, for these have sworn
To wage my wars, and worship me their King;
The old order changeth, yielding place to new;
And we that fight for our fair father Christ,
Seeing that ye be grown too weak and old 510
To drive the heathen from your Roman wall,
No tribute will we pay:’ so those great Lords
Drew back in wrath, and Arthur strove with Rome.

And Arthur and his knighthood for a space
Were all one will, and thro’ that strength the King 515
Drew in the petty principdoms under him,
Fought, and in twelve great battles overcame
The heathen hordes, and made a realm and reign’d.

GARETH AND LYNETTE.

THE last tall son of Lot and Bellicent,
 And tallest, Gareth, in a showerful spring
 Stared at the spate. A slender-shafted Pine
 Lost footing, fell, and so was whirl'd away.
 'How he went down,' said Gareth, 'as a false knight 5
 Or evil king before my lance, if lance
 Were mine to use — O senseless cataract,
 Bearing all down in thy precipitancy —
 And yet thou art but swollen with cold snows
 And mine is living blood: thou dost His will, 10
 The Maker's, and not knowest, and I that know,
 Have strength and wit, in my good mother's hall
 Linger with vacillating obedience,
 Prison'd, and kept and coax'd and whistled to —
 Since the good mother holds me still a child! 15
 Good mother is bad mother unto me!
 A worse were better; yet no worse would I;
 Heaven yield her for it, but in me put force
 To weary her ears with one continuous prayer,
 Until she let me fly discharg'd to sweep 20
 In ever-highering eagle-circles up
 To the great Sun of Glory, and thence swoop
 Down upon all things base, and dash them dead,
 A knight of Arthur, working out his will,
 To cleanse the world. Why, Gawain, when he came 25
 With Modred hither in the summertime,
 Ask'd me to tilt with him, the proven knight.
 Modred for want of worthier was the judge.
 Then I so shook him in the saddle, he said,
 "Thou hast half prevail'd against me," said so — he — 30

Tho' Modred biting his thin lips was mute,
For he is alway sullen: what care I?'

And Gareth went, and hovering round her chair
Ask'd, 'Mother, tho' ye count me still the child.
Sweet mother, do ye love the child?' She laugh'd, 35
'Thou art but a wild-goose to question it.'
'Then, mother, an ye love the child,' he said,
'Being a goose and rather tame than wild,
Hear the child's story.' 'Yea, my well-beloved,
An 'twere but of the goose and golden eggs.' 40

And Gareth answer'd her with kindling eyes,
'Nay, nay, good mother, but this egg of mine
Was finer gold than any goose can lay;
For this an Eagle, a royal Eagle, laid
Almost beyond eye-reach, on such a palm 45
As glitters gilded in thy Book of Hours.
And there was ever haunting round the palm
A lusty youth, but poor, who often saw
The splendor sparkling from aloft, and thought
"An I could climb and lay my hand upon it, 50
Then were I wealthier than a leash of kings."
But ever when he reach'd a hand to climb,
One, that had loved him from his childhood, caught
And stay'd him, "Climb not lest thou break thy neck,
I charge thee by my love," and so the boy, 55
Sweet mother, neither clomb nor brake his neck,
But break his very heart in pining for it,
And pass'd away.'

To whom the mother said,
'True love, sweet son, had risk'd himself and climb'd,
And handed down the golden treasure to him.' 60

And Gareth answer'd her with kindling eyes,
 'Gold? said I gold? — ay then, why he, or she,
 Or whosoe'er it was, or half the world
 Had ventured — *had* the thing I spake of been
 Mere gold — but this was all of that true steel, 65
 Whereof they forged the brand Excalibur,
 And lightnings play'd about it in the storm,
 And all the little fowl were flurried at it, *be d.*
 And there were cries and clashings in the nest,
 That sent him from his senses: let me go.' 70

Then Bellicent bemoan'd herself and said,
 'Hast thou no pity upon my loneliness?
 Lo, where thy father Lot beside the hearth
 Lies like a log, and all but smoulder'd out!
 For ever since when traitor to the King 75
 He fought against him in the Barons' war,
 And Arthur gave him back his territory,
 His age hath slowly droop'd, and now lies there
 A yet-warm corpse, and yet unburi-able,
 No more; nor sees, nor hears, nor speaks, nor knows. 80
 And both thy brethren are in Arthur's hall,
 Albeit neither loved with that full love
 I feel for thee, nor worthy such a love:
 Stay therefore thou: red berries charm the bird,
 And thee, mine innocent, the jousts, the wars, 85
 Who never knewest finger-ache, nor pang
 Of wrench'd or broken limb — and often chance
 In those brain-stunning shocks, and tourney-falls,
 Frights to my heart: but stay: follow the deer
 By these tall firs and our fast falling burns; 90
 So make thy manhood mightier day by day;
 Sweet is the chase: and I will seek thee out

Some comfortable bride and fair, to grace
Thy climbing life, and cherish my prone year,
Till falling into Lot's forgetfulness 95
I know not thee, myself, nor anything.
Stay, my best son! ye are yet more boy than man.'

Then Gareth, 'An ye hold me yet for child,
Hear yet once more the story of the child.
For, mother, there was once a King, like ours. 100
The prince his heir, when tall and marriageable,
Ask'd for a bride; and thereupon the King
Set two before him. One was fair, strong, arm'd —
But to be won by force — and many men
Desired her; one, good lack, no man desired. 105
And these were the conditions of the King:
That save he won the first by force, he needs
Must wed that other, whom no man desired,
A red-faced bride who knew herself so vile,
That evermore she long'd to hide herself, 110
Nor fronted man or woman, eye to eye —
Yea — some she cleaved to, but they died of her.
And one — they call'd her Fame; and one, — O Mother,
How can ye keep me tether'd to you — Shame!
Man am I grown, a man's work must I do. 115
Follow the deer? follow the Christ, the King,
Live pure, speak true, right wrong, follow the King —
Else, wherefore born?'

To whom the mother said,
'Sweet son, for there be many who deem him not,
Or will not deem him, wholly proven King — 120
Albeit in mine own heart I knew him King,
When I was frequent with him in my youth,

And heard him kingly speak, and doubted him
 No more than he, himself, but felt him mine,
 Of closest kin to me; yet — wilt thou leave 125
 Thine easeful biding here, and risk thine all,
 Life, limbs, for one that is not proven King?
 Stay, till the cloud that settles round his birth
 Hath lifted but a little. Stay, sweet son.'

And Gareth answer'd quickly, 'Not an hour, 130
 So that ye yield me — I will walk thro' fire,
 Mother, to gain it — your full leave to go.
 Not proven, who swept the dust of ruin'd Rome
 From off the threshold of the realm, and crush'd
 The Idolaters, and made the people free? 135
 Who should be King save him who makes us free?'

So when the Queen, who long had sought in vain
 To break him from the intent to which he grew,
 Found her son's will unwaveringly one,
 She answer'd craftily, 'Will ye walk thro' fire? 140
 Who walks thro' fire will hardly heed the smoke.
 Ay, go then, an ye must: only one proof,
 Before thou ask the King to make thee knight,
 Of thine obedience and thy love to me,
 Thy mother, — I demand.'

And Gareth cried, 145
 'A hard one, or a hundred, so I go.
 Nay — quick! the proof to prove me to the quick!'

But slowly spake the mother looking at him,
 'Prince, thou shalt go disguised to Arthur's hall,
 And hire thyself to serve for meats and drinks 150

Among the scullions and the kitchen-knaves,
And those that hand the dish across the bar.
Nor shalt thou tell thy name to any one
And thou shalt serve a twelvemonth and a day.'

For so the Queen believed that when her son 155
Beheld his only way to glory lead
Low down thro' villain kitchen-vassalage,
Her own true Gareth was too princely-proud
To pass thereby; so should he rest with her,
Closed in her castle from the sound of arms. 160

Silent awhile was Gareth, then replied,
'The thrall in person may be free in soul,
And I shall see the jousts. Thy son am I,
And since thou art my mother, must obey.
I therefore yield me freely to thy will; 165
For hence will I, disguised, and hire myself
To serve with scullions and with kitchen-knaves;
Nor tell my name to any — no, not the King.'

Gareth awhile linger'd. The mother's eye 170
Full of the wistful fear that he would go,
And turning toward him wheresoe'er he turn'd,
Perplex'd his outward purpose, till an hour,
When waken'd by the wind which with full voice
Swept bellowing thro' the darkness on to dawn,
He rose, and out of slumber calling two 175
That still had tended on him from his birth,
Before the wakeful mother heard him, went.

The three were clad like tillers of the soil.
Southward they set their faces. The birds made

Melody on branch, and melody in mid-air. 180
The damp hill-slopes were quicken'd into green.
And the live green had kindled into flowers,
For it was past the time of Easterday.

So, when their feet were planted on the plain
That broaden'd toward the base of Camelot, 185
Far off they saw the silver-misty morn
Rolling her smoke about the royal mount,
That rose between the forest and the field.
At times the summit of the high city flash'd;
At times the spires and turrets half-way down 190
Prick'd thro' the mist: at times the great gate shone
Only, that open'd on the field below:
Anon, the whole fair city had disappear'd.

Then those who went with Gareth were amazed,
One crying, 'Let us go no further, lord. 195
Here is a city of Enchanters, built
By fairy Kings.' The second echo'd him,
'Lord, we have heard from our wise man at home
To Northward, that this King is not the King,
But only changeling out of Fairyland, 200
Who drave the heathen hence by sorcery
And Merlin's glamour.' Then the first again,
'Lord, there is no such city anywhere,
But all a vision.'

Gareth answer'd them
With laughter, swearing he had glamour enow 205
In his own blood, his princedom, youth and hopes,
To plunge old Merlin in the Arabian sea;
So push'd them all unwilling toward the gate.

And there was no gate like it under heaven,
For barefoot on the keystone, which was lined 210
And rippled like an ever-fleeting wave,
The Lady of the Lake stood: all her dress
Wept from her sides as water flowing away;
But like the cross her great and goodly arms
Stretch'd under all the cornice and upheld: 215
And drops of water fell from either hand;
And down from one a sword was hung, from one
A censer, either worn with wind and storm;
And o'er her breast floated the sacred fish;
And in the space to left of her, and right, 220
Were Arthur's wars in weird devices done,
New things and old co-twisted, as if Time
Were nothing, so inveterately, that men
Were giddy gazing there; and over all
High on the top were those three Queens, the friends 225
Of Arthur, who should help him at his need.

Then those with Gareth for so long a space
Stared at the figures, that at last it seem'd
The dragon-boughts and elvish emblemings
Began to move, seethe, twine and curl: they called 230
To Gareth, 'Lord, the gateway is alive.'

And Gareth likewise on them fix'd his eyes
So long, that even to him they seem'd to move.
Out of the city a blast of music peal'd.
Back from the gate started the three, to whom 235
From out thereunder came an ancient man,
Long-bearded, saying, 'Who be ye, my sons?'

Then Gareth, 'We be tillers of the soil,
Who leaving share in furrow come to see

The glories of our King: but these, my men,
(Your city moved so weirdly in the mist)
Doubt if the King be King at all, or come
From Fairyland; and whether this be built
By magic, and by fairy Kings and Queens;
Or whether there be any city at all, 245
Or all a vision: and this music now
Hath scared them both, but tell thou these the truth.'

Then that old Seer made answer playing on him,
And saying, 'Son, I have seen the good ship sail
Keel upward and mast downward in the heavens, 250
And solid turrets topsy-turvy in air:
And here is truth; but an it please thee not,
Take thou the truth as thou hast told it me.
For truly as thou sayest, a Fairy King
And Fairy Queens have built the city, son; 255
They came from out a sacred mountain-cleft
Toward the sunrise, each with harp in hand,
And built it to the music of their harps.
And as thou sayest, it is enchanted, son,
For there is nothing in it as it seems 260
Saving the King; tho' some there be that hold
The King a shadow, and the city real:
Yet take thou heed of him, for, so thou pass
Beneath this archway, then wilt thou become
A thrall to his enchantments, for the King 265
Will bind thee by such vows, as is a shame
A man should not be bound by, yet the which
No man can keep; but, so thou dread to swear,
I pass not beneath this gateway, but abide
Without, among the cattle of the field. 270
For an ye heard a music, like enow

They are building still, seeing the city is built
 To music, therefore never built at all,
 And therefore built forever.'

Gareth spake

Anger'd, 'Old Master, reverence thine own beard 275
 That looks as white as utter truth, and seems
 Wellnigh as long as thou art statured tall!
 Why mockest thou the stranger that hath been
 To thee fair-spoken?'

But the Seer replied,

'Know ye not then the Riddling of the Bards? 280
 "Confusion, and elusion, and relation,
 Elusion, and occasion, and evasion?"
 I mock thee not, but as thou mockest me,
 And all that see thee, for thou art not who
 Thou seemest, but I know thee who thou art. 285
 And now thou goest up to mock the King,
 Who cannot brook the shadow of any lie.'

Unmockingly the mocker ending here,
 Turn'd to the right, and pass'd along the plain;
 Whom Gareth looking after said, 'My men, 290
 Our one white lie sits like a little ghost
 Here on the threshold of our enterprise.
 Let love be blamed for it, not she, nor I:
 Well, we will make amends.'

With all good cheer

He spake and laugh'd, then enter'd with his twain 295
 Camelot, a city of shadowy palaces
 And stately, rich in emblem and the work
 Of ancient kings who did their days in stone,

Which Merlin's hand, the Mage at Arthur's court,
Knowing all arts, had touch'd, and everywhere 300
At Arthur's ordinance, tipp'd with lessening peak
And pinnacle, and had made it spire to heaven.
And ever and anon a knight would pass
Outward, or inward to the hall: his arms
Clash'd; and the sound was good to Gareth's ear. 305
And out of bower and casement shyly glanced
Eyes of pure women, wholesome stars of love.
And all about a healthful people stepp'd
As in the presence of a gracious king.

Then into hall Gareth ascending heard 310
A voice, the voice of Arthur, and beheld
Far over heads in that long-vaulted hall
The splendor of the presence of the King
Throned, and delivering doom — and look'd no more —
But felt his young heart hammering in his ears, 315
And thought, 'For this half-shadow of a lie
The truthful King will doom me when I speak.'
Yet pressing on, tho' all in fear to find
Sir Gawain or Sir Modred, saw nor one
Nor other, but in all the listening eyes 320
Of those tall knights, that ranged about the throne,
Clear honor shining like the dewy star
Of dawn, and faith in their great King, with pure
Affection, and the light of victory,
And glory gain'd, and evermore to gain. 325

Then came a widow crying to the King,
'A boon, Sir King! Thy father, Uther, reft
From my dead lord a field with violence:
For howsoe'er at first he proffer'd gold,

Yet, for the field was pleasant in our eyes, 330
We yielded not; and then he reft us of it
Perforce, and left us neither gold nor field.'

Said Arthur, 'Whether would ye?' gold or field?'
To whom the woman weeping, 'Nay, my lord,
The field was pleasant in my husband's eye.' 335

And Arthur, 'Have thy pleasant field again,
And thrice the gold for Uther's use thereof,
According to the years. No boon is here,
But justice, so thy say be proven true.
Accursed, who from the wrongs his father did 340
Would shape himself a right!'

And while she past
Came yet another widow crying to him,
'A boon, Sir King! Thine enemy, King, am I.
With thine own hand thou slewest my dear lord,
A knight of Uther in the Barons' war, 345
When Lot and many another rose and fought
Against thee, saying thou wert basely born,
I held with these, and loathe to ask thee aught.
Yet lo! my husband's brother had my son
Thrall'd in his castle, and hath starved him dead; 350
And standeth seized of that inheritance *which was*
Which thou that slewest the sire hast left the son.
So tho' I scarce can ask it thee for hate,
Grant me some knight to do the battle for me,
Kill the foul thief, and wreak me for my son.' 355

Then strode a good knight forward, crying to him,
'A boon, Sir King! I am her kinsman, I.
Give me to right her wrong, and slay the man.'

Then came Sir Kay, the seneschal, and cried,
 'A boon, Sir King! even that thou grant her none, 360
 This railer, that hath mock'd thee in full hall —
 None; or the wholesome boon of gyve and gag.'

But Arthur, 'We sit King, to help the wrong'd
 Thro' all our realm. The woman loves her lord.
 Peace to thee, woman, with thy loves and hates! 365
 The kings of old had doom'd thee to the flames,
 Aurelius Emrys would have scourged thee dead.
 And Uther slit thy tongue: but get thee hence —
 Lest that rough humor of the kings of old
 Return upon me! Thou that art her kin, 370
 Go likewise; lay him low and slay him not,
 But bring him here, that I may judge the right,
 According to the justice of the King:
 Then, be he guilty, by that deathless King
 Who lived and died for men, the man shall die.' 375

Then came in hall the messenger of Mark,
 A name of evil savor in the land,
 The Cornish king. In either hand he bore
 What dazzled all, and shone far-off as shines
 A field of charlock in the sudden sun 380
 Between two showers, a cloth of palest gold,
 Which down he laid before the throne, and knelt,
 Delivering, that his lord, the vassal king,
 Was even upon his way to Camelot;
 For having heard that Arthur of his grace 385
 Had made his goodly cousin, Tristram, knight,
 And, for himself was of the greater state,
 Being a king, he trusted his liege-lord
 Would yield him this large honor all the more;

So pray'd him well to accept this cloth of gold, 390
In token of true heart and fealty.

Then Arthur cried to rend the cloth, to rend
In pieces, and so cast it on the hearth.
An oak-tree smoulder'd there. 'The goodly knight!
What! shall the shield of Mark stand among these?' 395
For, midway down the side of that long hall
A stately pile, — whereof along the front,
Some blazon'd, some but carven, and some blank,
There ran a treble range of stony shields, —
Rose, and high-arching overbrow'd the hearth. 400
And under every shield a knight was named:
For this was Arthur's custom in his hall;
When some good knight had done one noble deed,
His arms were carven only; but if twain
His arms were blazon'd also; but if none 405
The shield was blank and bare without a sign
Saving the name beneath; and Gareth saw
The shield of Gawain blazon'd rich and bright,
And Modred's blank as death; and Arthur cried
To rend the cloth and cast it on the hearth. 410

'More like are we to reave him of his crown
Than make him knight because men call him king,
The kings we found, ye know we stay'd their hands
From war among themselves, but left them kings;
Of whom were any bounteous, merciful, 415
Truth-speaking, brave, good livers, them we enroll'd
Among us, and they sit within our hall.
But Mark hath tarnish'd the great name of king,
As Mark would sully the low state of churl:
And, seeing he hath sent us cloth of gold, 420

Return, and meet, and hold him from our eyes,
 Lest we should lap him up in cloth of lead,
 Silenced forever — craven — a man of plots.
 Craft, poisonous counsels, wayside ambushings —
 No fault of thine: let Kay the seneschal 425
 Look to thy wants, and send thee satisfied —
 Accursed, who strikes nor lets the hand be seen!’

And many another suppliant crying came
 With noise of ravage wrought by beast and man,
 And evermore a knight would ride away. 430

Last, Gareth leaning both hands heavily
 Down on the shoulders of the twain, his men,
 Approach’d between them toward the King, and ask’d,
 ‘A boon, Sir King (his voice was all ashamed),
 For see ye not how weak and hungerworn 435
 I seem — leaning on these? grant me to serve
 For meat and drink among thy kitchen-knives
 A twelvemonth and a day, nor seek my name.
 Hereafter I will fight.’

To him the King,
 ‘A goodly youth and worth a goodlier boon! 440
 But so thou wilt no goodlier, then must Kay,
 The master of the meats and drinks, be thine.’

He rose and past; then Kay, a man of mien
 Wan-sallow as the plant that feels itself
 Root-bitten by white lichen,
 ‘Lo ye now! 445
 This fellow hath broken from some Abbey, where,
 God wot, he had not beef and brewis enow.
 However that might chance! but an he work,
 Like any pigeon will I cram his crop,
 And sleeker shall he shine than any hog.’ 450

Then Lancelot standing near, 'Sir Seneschal,
Sleuth-hound thou knowest, and gray, and all the hounds;
A horse thou knowest, a man thou dost not know:
Broad brows and fair, a fluent hair and fine,
High nose, a nostril large and fine, and hands 455
Large, fair and fine! — Some young lad's mystery —
But, or from sheepcot or king's hall, the boy
Is noble-natured. Treat him with all grace,
Lest he should come to shame thy judging of him.'

Then Kay, 'What murmurest thou of mystery? 460
Think ye this fellow will poison the King's dish?
Nay, for he spake too fool-like: mystery!
Tut, an the lad were noble, he had ask'd
For horse and armor: fair and fine, forsooth!
Sir Fine-face, Sir Fair-hands? but see thou to it 465
That thine own fineness, Lancelot, some fine day
Undo thee not — and leave my man to me.'

So Gareth all for glory underwent
The sooty yoke of kitchen-vassalage;
Ate with young lads his portion by the door, 470
And couch'd at night with grimy kitchen-knaves.
And Lancelot ever spake him pleasantly,
But Kay the seneschal who loved him not
Would hustle and harry him, and labor him
Beyond his comrade of the hearth, and set 475
To turn the broach, draw water, or hew wood,
Or grosser tasks; and Gareth bow'd himself
With all obedience to the King, and wrought
All kind of service with a noble ease
That graced the lowliest act in doing it. 480
And when the thralls had talk among themselves,

And one would praise the love that link'd the King
And Lancelot — how the King had saved his life
In battle twice, and Lancelot once the King's —
For Lancelot was the first in Tournament, 485
But Arthur mightiest on the battle-field —
Gareth was glad. Or if some other told,
How once the wandering forester at dawn,
Far over the blue tarns and hazy seas,
On *Caer-Eryri's* highest found the King, 490
A naked babe, of whom the Prophet spake,
'He passes to the Isle Avilion,
He passes and is heal'd and cannot die' —
Gareth was glad. But if their talk were foul,
Then would he whistle rapid as any lark, 495
Or carol some old roundelay, and so loud
That first they mock'd, but, after, revered him
Or Gareth telling some prodigious tale
Of knights, who sliced a red life-bubbling way
Thro' twenty folds of twisted dragon, held 500
All in a gap-mouth'd circle his good mates
Lying or sitting round him, idle hands,
Charm'd: till Sir Kay, the seneschal, would come
Blustering upon them, like a sudden wind
Among dead leaves, and drive them all apart. 505
Or when the thralls had sport among themselves,
So there were any trial of mastery,
He, by two yards in casting bar or stone
Was counted best; and if there chanced a joust,
So that Sir Kay nodded him leave to go, 510
Would hurry thither, and when he saw the knights
Clash like the coming and retiring wave,
And the spear spring, and good horse reel, the boy
Was half beyond himself for ecstasy.

So for a month he wrought among the thralls ; 515
But in the weeks that follow'd, the good Queen,
Repentant of the word she made him swear,
And saddening in her childless castle, sent.
Between the in-crescent and de-crescent moon,
Arms for her son, and loosed him from his vow. 520

This, Gareth hearing from a squire of Lot
With whom he used to play at tourney once,
When both were children, and in lonely haunts
Would scratch a ragged oval on the sand,
And each at either dash from either end — 525
Shame never made girl redder than Gareth joy.
He laugh'd ; he sprang. ' Out of the smoke, at once
I leap from Satan's foot to Peter's knee —
These news be mine, none other's — nay, the King's —
Descend into the city : ' whereon he sought 530
The King alone, and found, and told him all.

' I have stagger'd thy strong Gawain in a tilt
For pastime ; yea, he said it : joust can I.
Make me thy knight — in secret ! let my name
Be hidden, and give me the first quest, I spring 535
Like flame from ashes.'

Here the King's calm eye
Fell on, and check'd and made him flush, and bow
Lowly, to kiss his hand, who answer'd him,
' Son, the good mother let me know thee here,
And sent her wish that I would yield thee thine. 540
Make thee my knight ? my knights are sworn to vows
Of utter hardihood, utter gentleness,
And, loving, utter faithfulness in love,
And uttermost obedience to the King.'

Then Gareth, lightly springing from his knees, 545
 ‘My King, for hardihood I can promise thee.
 For uttermost obedience make demand
 Of whom you gave me to, the Seneschal,
 No mellow master of the meats and drinks!
 And as for love, God wot, I love not yet, 550
 But love I shall, God willing.’

And the King —
 ‘Make thee my knight in secret? yea, but he,
 Our noblest brother, and our truest man,
 And one with me in all, he needs must know.’

‘Let Lancelot know, my King, let Lancelot know, 555
 Thy noblest and thy truest!’

And the King —
 ‘But wherefore would ye men should wonder at you?
 Nay, rather for the sake of me, their King,
 And the deed’s sake my knighthood do the deed,
 Than to be noised of.’

Merrily Gareth ask’d, 560
 ‘Have I not earn’d my cake in baking of it?
 Let be my name until I make my name!
 My deeds will speak; it is but for a day.’
 So with a kindly hand on Gareth’s arm
 Smiled the great King, and half-unwillingly, 565
 Loving his lusty youthhood, yielded to him.
 Then, after summoning Lancelot privily,
 ‘I have given him the first quest: he is not proven,
 Look therefore when he calls for this in hall,
 Thou get to horse and follow him far away. 570
 Cover the lions on thy shield, and see
 Far as thou mayest, he be nor ta’en nor slain.’

Then that same day there pass'd into the hall
A damsel of high lineage, and a brow
May-blossom, and a cheek of apple-blossom, 575
Hawk-eyes; and lightly was her slender nose
Tip-tilted like the petal of a flower;
She into hall pass'd with her page and cried,

‘O King, for thou hast driven the foe without,
See to the foe within! bridge, ford, beset 580
By bandits, every one that owns a tower
The Lord for half a league. Why sit ye there?
Rest would I not, Sir King, an I were king,
Till even the lonest hold were all as free
From cursed bloodshed, as thine altar-cloth 585
From that best blood it is a sin to spill.’

‘Comfort thyself,’ said Arthur, ‘I nor mine
Rest: so my knighthood keep the vows they swore,
The wastest moorland of our realm shall be
Safe, damsel, as the centre of this hall. 590
What is thy name? thy need?’

‘My name?’ she said —

‘Lynette my name; noble; my need, a knight
To combat for my sister, Lyonors,
A lady of high lineage, of great lands,
And comely, yea, and comelier than myself. 595
She lives in Castle Perilous: a river
Runs in three loops about her living-place;
And o’er it are three passings, and three knights
Defend the passings, brethren, and a fourth
And of that four the mightiest, holds her stay’d 600
In her own castle, and so besieges her
To break her will, and make her wed with him:

And but delays his purport till thou send
To do the battle with him, thy chief man
Sir Lancelot whom he trusts to overthrow, 605
Then wed, with glory: but she will not wed
Save whom she loveth, or a holy life.
Now therefore have I come for Lancelot.'

Then Arthur mindful of Sir Gareth ask'd,
'Damsel, ye know this Order lives to crush 610
All wrongers of the Realm. But say, these four,
Who be they? What the fashion of the men?'

'They be of foolish fashion, O Sir King,
The fashion of that old knight-errantry
Who ride abroad and do but what they will; 615
Courteous or bestial from the moment, such
As have nor law nor king, and three of these
Proud in their fantasy call themselves the Day,
Morning-Star, and Noon-Sun, and Evening-Star,
Being strong fools; and never a whit more wise 620
The fourth, who alway rideth arm'd in black,
A huge man-beast of boundless savagery.
He names himself the Night and oftener Death,
And wears a helmet mounted with a skull,
And bears a skeleton figured on his arms, 625
To show that who may slay or scape the three
Slain by himself shall enter endless night.
And all these four be fools, but mighty men,
And therefore am I come for Lancelot.'

Hereat Sir Gareth call'd from where he rose, 630
A head with kindling eyes above the throng,
'A boon, Sir King — this quest!' then — for he mark'd

Kay near him groaning like a wounded bull —
'Yea, King, thou knowest thy kitchen-knave am I,
And mighty thro' thy meats and drinks am I, 635
And I can topple over a hundred such.
Thy promise, King,' and Arthur glancing at him,
Brought down a momentary brow. 'Rough, sudden,
And pardonable, worthy to be knight —
Go therefore,' and all hearers were amazed. 640

But on the damsel's forehead shame, pride, wrath
Slew the May-white: she lifted either arm.
'Fie on thee, King! I ask'd for thy chief knight,
And thou hast given me but a kitchen-knave.'
Then ere a man in hall could stay her, turn'd, 645
Fled down the lane of access to the King,
Took horse, descended the slope street, and past
The weird white gate, and paused without, beside
The field of tourney, murmuring 'kitchen-knave.'

Now two great entries open'd from the hall, 650
At one end one, that gave upon a range
Of level pavement where the King would pace
At sunrise, gazing over plain and wood;
And down from this a lordly stairway sloped
Till lost in blowing trees and tops of towers; 655
And out by this main doorway pass'd the King.
But one was counter to the hearth, and rose
High that the highest-crested helm could ride
Therethro' nor graze: and by this entry fled
The damsel in her wrath, and on to this 660
Sir Gareth strode, and saw without the door
King Arthur's gift, the worth of half a town,
A warhorse of the best, and near it stood

The two that out of north had follow'd him :
 This bare a maiden shield, a casque : that held 665
 The horse, the spear, whereat Sir Gareth loosed
 A cloak that dropp'd from collar-bone to heel,
 A cloth of roughest web, and cast it down,
 And from it like a fuel-smother'd fire,
 That look'd half-dead, brake bright, and flash'd as those 670
 Dull-coated things, that making slide apart
 Their dusk wing-cases, all beneath there burns
 A jewell'd harness, ere they pass and fly.
 So Gareth ere he parted flash'd in arms.
 Then as he donn'd the helm, and took the shield 675
 And mounted horse and grasp'd a spear, of grain
 Storm-strengthen'd on a windy site, and tipp'd
 With trenchant steel, around him slowly press'd
 The people, while from out of kitchen came
 The thralls in throng, and seeing who had work'd 680
 Lustier than any, and whom they could but love,
 Mounted in arms, threw up their caps and cried,
 ' God bless the King, and all his fellowship ! '
 And on thro' lanes of shouting Gareth rode
 Down the slope street, and pass'd without the gate. 685

So Gareth pass'd with joy ; but as the cur
 Pluck'd from the cur he fights with, ere his cause
 Be cool'd by fighting, follows, being named,
 His owner, but remembers all, and growls
 Remembering, so Sir Kay beside the door 690
 Mutter'd in scorn of Gareth whom he used
 To harry and hustle.

' Bound upon a quest
 With horse and arms — the King hath pass'd his time —
 My scullion knave ! Thralls, to your work again,

For an your fire be low ye kindle mine ! 695
Will there be dawn in West and eve in East ?
Begone ! — my knave ! — belike and like enow
Some old head-blow not heeded in his youth
So shook his wits they wander in his prime —
Crazed ! How the villain lifted up his voice, 700
Nor shamed to bawl himself a kitchen-knave.
Tut : he was tame and meek enow with me,
Till peacock'd up with Lancelot's noticing.
Well — I will after my loud knave, and learn
Whether he know me for his master yet. 705
Out of the smoke he came, and so my lance
Hold, by God's grace, he shall into the mire —
Thence, if the King awoken from his craze,
Into the smoke again.'

But Lancelot said,
' Kay, wherefore wilt thou go against the King, 710
For that did never he whereon ye rail,
But ever meekly served the King in thee ?
Abide : take counsel ; for this lad is great
And lusty, and knowing both of lance and sword.'
' Tut, tell not me,' said Kay, ' ye are overfine 715
To mar stout knaves with foolish courtesies :'
Then mounted, on thro' silent faces rode
Down the slope city, and out beyond the gate.

But by the field of tourney lingering yet
Mutter'd the damsel, ' Wherefore did the King 720
Scorn me ? for, were Sir Lancelot lack'd, at least
He might have yielded to me one of those
Who tilt for lady's love and glory here,
Rather than — O sweet heaven ! O fie upon him —
His kitchen-knave.'

To whom Sir Gareth drew 725
 (And there were none but few goodlier than he)
 Shining in arms, ‘Damsel, the quest is mine.
 Lead, and I follow.’ She thereat, as one
 That smells a foul-flesh’d agaric in the holt,
 And deems it carrion of some woodland thing, 730
 Or shrew, or weasel, nipp’d her slender nose
 With petulant thumb and finger, shrilling,
 ‘Hence!
 Avoid, thou smellest all of kitchen-grease.
 And look who comes behind,’ for there was Kay.
 ‘Knowest thou not me? thy master? I am Kay. 735
 We lack thee by the hearth.’

And Gareth to him,
 ‘Master no more! too well I know thee, ay —
 The most ungentle knight in Arthur’s hall.’
 ‘Have at thee then,’ said Kay: they shock’d, and Kay
 Fell shoulder-slipp’d, and Gareth cried again, 740
 ‘Lead, and I follow,’ and fast away she fled.

But after sod and shingle ceased to fly
 Behind her, and the heart of her good horse
 Was nigh to burst with violence of the beat,
 Perforce she stay’d, and overtaken spoke: 745

‘What doest thou, scullion, in my fellowship?
 Deem’st thou that I accept thee aught the more
 Or love thee better, that by some device
 Full cowardly, or by mere unhappiness,
 Thou hast overthrown and slain thy master — thou! — 750
 Dish-washer and broach-turner, loon! — to me
 Thou smellest all of kitchen as before.’

‘Damsel,’ Sir Gareth answer’d gently, ‘say
Whate’er ye will, but whatsoe’er ye say,
I leave not till I finish this fair quest, 755
Or die therefor.’

‘Ay, wilt thou finish it?
Sweet lord, how like a noble knight he talks!
The listening rogue hath caught the manner of it.
But, knave, anon thou shalt be met with, knave,
And then by such a one that thou for all 760
The kitchen brewis that was ever supp’d
Shalt not once dare to look him in the face.’

‘I shall assay,’ said Gareth with a smile
That madden’d her, and away she flash’d again
Down the long avenues of a boundless wood, 765
And Gareth following was again beknaved.

‘Sir Kitchen-knave, I have miss’d the only way
Where Arthur’s men are set along the wood:
The wood is nigh as full of thieves as leaves:
If both be slain, I am rid of thee; but yet, 770
Sir Scullion, canst thou use that spit of thine?
Fight, an thou canst: I have miss’d the only way.’

So till the dusk that follow’d evensong
Rode on the two, reviler and reviled;
Then after one long slope was mounted, saw, 775
Bowl-shaped, thro’ tops of many thousand pines
A gloomy-gladed hollow slowly sink
To westward—in the deeps whereof a mere,
Round as the red eye of an Eagle-owl,
Under the half-dead sunset glared: and shouts 780
Ascended, and there brake a servingman

Flying from out of the black wood, and crying,
 ‘They have bound my lord to cast him in the mere.’
 Then Gareth, ‘Bound am I to right the wrong’d,
 But straitlier bound am I to bide with thee.’ 785
 And when the damsel spake contemptuously,
 ‘Lead, and I follow,’ Gareth cried again
 ‘Follow, I lead!’ so down among the pines
 He plunged: and there, blackshadow’d nigh the mere,
 And mid-thigh-deep in bulrushes and reed, 790
 Saw six tall men haling a seventh along,
 A stone about his neck to drown him in it.
 Three with good blows he quieted, but three
 Fled thro’ the pines: and Gareth loosed the stone
 From off his neck, then in the mere beside 795
 Tumbled it; oilily bubbled up the mere.
 Last, Gareth loosed his bonds, and on free feet
 Set him, a stalwart Baron, Arthur’s friend.

‘Well that ye came, or else these caitiff rogues
 Had wreak’d themselves on me: good cause is theirs 800
 To hate me, for my wont hath ever been
 To catch my thief, and then like vermin here
 Drown him, and with a stone about his neck;
 And under this wan water many of them
 Lie rotting, but at night let go the stone, 805
 And rise, and flickering in a grimly light
 Dance on the mere. Good now, ye have saved a life
 Worth somewhat as the cleanser of this wood,
 And fain would I reward thee worshipfully.
 What guerdon will ye?’

Gareth sharply spake, 810
 ‘None! for the deed’s sake have I done the deed,

In uttermost obedience to the King.
But wilt thou yield this damsel harborage ?'

Whereat the Baron saying, ' I well believe
You be of Arthur's Table,' a light laugh 815
Broke from Lynette, ' Ay, truly of a truth,
And in a sort, being Arthur's kitchen-knave ! —
But deem not I accept thee aught the more,
Scullion, for running sharply with thy spit
Down on a rout of craven foresters. 820
A thresher with his flail had scattered them.
Nay — for thou smellest of the kitchen still.
But an this lord will yield us harborage,
Well.'

So she spake. A league beyond the wood,
All in a full-fair manor and a rich, 825
His towers where that day a feast had been
Held in high hall, and many a viand left,
And many a costly cate, received the three.
And there they placed a peacock in his pride
Before the damsel, and the Baron set 830
Gareth beside her, but at once she rose.

' Meseems, that here is much discourtesy,
Setting this knave, Lord Baron, at my side.
Hear me — this morn I stood in Arthur's hall,
And pray'd the King would grant me Lancelot 835
To fight the brotherhood of Day and Night —
The last a monster unsubduable
Of any save of him for whom I call'd —
Suddenly bawls this frontless kitchen-knave,
' The quest is mine ; thy kitchen-knave am I, 840

And mighty thro' thy meats and drinks am I."
 Then Arthur all at once gone mad replies,
 "Go therefore," and so gives the quest to him - -
 Him — here — a villain fitter to stick swine
 Than ride abroad redressing women's wrong,
 Or sit beside a noble gentlewoman.'

845

Then half-ashamed and part-amazed, the lord
 Now look'd at one and now at other; left
 The damsel by the peacock in his pride,
 And, seating Gareth at another board,
 Sat down beside him, ate and then began.

850

• Friend, whether thou be kitchen-knave, or not,
 Or whether it be the maiden's fantasy,
 And whether she be mad, or else the King,
 Or both or neither, or thyself be mad,
 I ask not: but thou strikest a strong stroke,
 For strong thou art and goodly therewithal.
 And saver of my life; and therefore now,
 For here be mighty men to joust with, weigh
 Whether thou wilt not with thy damsel back
 To crave again Sir Lancelot of the King.
 Thy pardon; I but speak for thine avail,
 The saver of my life.'

855

860

And Gareth said,
 'Full pardon, but I follow up the quest,
 Despite of Day and Night and Death and Hell.'

865

So when, next morn, the lord whose life he saved
 Had, some brief space, convey'd them on their way
 And left them with God-speed, Sir Gareth spake,
 'Lead, and I follow.' Haughtily she replied,

‘I fly no more: I allow thee for an hour. 870
Lion and stoat have isled together, knave,
In time of flood. Nay, furthermore, methinks
Some ruth is mine for thee. Back, wilt thou, fool?
For hard by here is one will overthrow
And slay thee: then will I to court again, 875
And shame the King for only yielding me
My champion from the ashes of his hearth.’

To whom Sir Gareth answer’d courteously,
‘Say thou thy say, and I will do my deed.
Allow me for mine hour, and thou wilt find 880
My fortunes all as fair as hers who lay
Among the ashes and wedded the King’s son.’

Then to the shore of one of those long loops
Wherethro’ the serpent river coil’d, they came.
Rough-thicketed were the banks and steep; the stream 885
Full, narrow; this a bridge of single arc
Took at a leap; and on the further side
Arose a silk pavilion, gay with gold
In streaks and rays, and all Lent-lily in hue,
Save that the dome was purple, and above, 890
Crimson, a slender banneret fluttering.
And therefore the lawless warrior paced
Unarm’d and calling, ‘Damsel, is this he,
The champion thou hast brought from Arthur’s hall?
For whom we let thee pass.’ ‘Nay, nay,’ she said, 895
‘Sir Morning-Star. The King in utter scorn
Of thee and thy much folly hath sent thee here
His kitchen-knave: and look thou to thyself.
See that he fall not on thee suddenly,
And slay thee unarm’d: he is not knight but knave.’ 900

Then at his call, 'O daughters of the Dawn,
 And servants of the Morning-Star, approach,
 Arm me,' from out the silken curtain-folds
 Bare-footed and bare-headed three fair girls
 In gilt and rosy raiment came: their feet 905
 In dewy grasses glisten'd; and the hair
 All over glanced with dewdrop or with gem
 Like sparkles in the stone Avanturine.
 These arm'd him in blue arms, and gave a shield
 Blue also, and thereon the morning star. 910
 And Gareth silent gazed upon the knight,
 Who stood a moment, ere his horse was brought,
 Glorifying: and in the stream beneath him, shone
 Unmingled with Heaven's azure waveringly,
 The gay pavilion and the naked feet, 915
 His arms, the rosy raiment, and the star.

Then she that watch'd him, 'Wherefore stare ye so?
 Thou shakest in thy fear: there yet is time:
 Flee down the valley before he get to horse.
 Who will cry shame? Thou art not knight but knave.' 920

Said Gareth, 'Damsel, whether knave or knight,
 Far liefer had I fight a score of times
 Than hear thee so missay me and revile.
 Fair words were best for him who fights for thee;
 But truly foul are better, for they send 925
 That strength of anger thro' mine arms, I know
 That I shall overthrow him.'

And he that bore
 The star, being mounted, cried from o'er the bridge,
 'A kitchen-knave, and sent in scorn of me!
 Such fight not I, but answer scorn with scorn. 930

For this were shame to do him further wrong
 Than set him on his feet, and take his horse
 And arms, and so return him to the King.
 Come, therefore, leave thy lady lightly, knave.
 Avoid: for it beseemeth not a knave 935
 To ride with such a lady.'

'Dog, thou liest.
 I spring from loftier lineage than thine own.'
 He spake; and all at fiery speed the two
 Shock'd on the central bridge, and either spear
 Bent but not break, and either knight at once, 940
 Hurl'd as a stone from out of a catapult
 Beyond his horse's crupper and the bridge,
 Fell, as if dead; but quickly rose and drew,
 And Gareth lash'd so fiercely with his brand
 He drave his enemy backward down the bridge, 945
 The damsel crying, 'Well-stricken, kitchen-knave!'
 Till Gareth's shield was cloven; but one stroke
 Laid him that clove it grovelling on the ground.

Then cried the fall'n, 'Take not my life: I yield.'
 And Gareth, 'So this damsel ask it of me 950
 Good — I accord it easily as a grace.'
 She reddening, 'Insolent scullion: I of thee?
 I bound to thee for any favor ask'd!'
 'Then shall he die.' And Gareth there unlaced
 His helmet as to slay him, but she shriek'd, 955
 'Be not so hardy, scullion, as to slay
 One nobler than thyself.' 'Damsel, thy charge
 Is an abounding pleasure to me. Knight,
 Thy life is thine at her command. Arise
 And quickly pass to Arthur's hall, and say 960
 His kitchen-knave hath sent thee. See thou crave

His pardon for thy breaking of his laws.
Myself, when I return, will plead for thee.
Thy shield is mine — farewell ; and, damsel,
Lead, and I follow.'

And fast away she fled. 965

Then when he came upon her, spake, • Methought,
Knave, when I watch'd thee striking on the bridge
The savour of thy kitchen came upon me
A little faintlier : but the wind hath changed :
I scent it twenty-fold.' And then she sang, 970
“ O morning star ” (not that tall felon there
Whom thou by sorcery or unhappiness
Or some device, hast foully overthrown),
“ O morning star that smilest in the blue,
O star, my morning dream hath proven true, 975
Smile sweetly, thou ! my love hath smiled on me.”

‘ But thou begone, take counsel, and away,
For hard by here is one that guards a ford —
The second brother in their fool’s parable —
Will pay thee all thy wages, and to boot. 980
Care not for shame : thou art not knight but knave.’

To whom Sir Gareth answer’d, laughingly,
‘ Parables ? Hear a parable of the knave.
When I was kitchen-knave among the rest,
Fierce was the hearth, and one of my co-mates 985
Own’d a rough dog, to whom he cast his coat,
“ Guard it,” and there was none to meddle with it.
And such a coat art thou, and thee the King
Gave me to guard, and such a dog am I,
To worry, and not to flee — and — knight or knave — 990
The knave that doth thee service as full knight

Is all as good, meseems, as any knight
Toward thy sister's freeing.'

‘Ay, Sir Knave!

Ay, knave, because thou strikest as a knight,
Being but knave, I hate thee all the more.’ 995

‘Fair damsel, you should worship me the more,
That, being but knave, I throw thine enemies.’

‘Ay, ay,’ she said, ‘but thou shalt meet thy match.’

So when they touch'd the second river-loop,
Huge on a huge red horse and all in mail 1000
Burnish'd to blinding, shone the Noonday Sun
Beyond a raging shallow. As if the flower,
That blows a globe of after arrowlets,
Ten thousand fold had grown, flash'd the fierce shield,
All sun; and Gareth's eyes had flying blots 1005
Before them when he turn'd from watching him.
He from beyond the roaring shallow roar'd,
‘What doest thou, brother, in my marches here?’
And she athwart the shallow shrill'd again,
‘Here is a kitchen-knave from Arthur's hall 1010
Hath overthrown thy brother, and hath his arms.’
‘Ugh!’ cried the Sun, and vizoring up a red
And cipher face of rounded foolishness,
Push'd horse across the foamings of the ford,
Whom Gareth met midstream: no room was there 1015
For lance or tourney-skill: four strokes they struck
With sword, and these were mighty; the new knight
Had fear he might be shamed; but as the Sun
Heaved up a ponderous arm to strike the fifth,
The hoof of his horse slipp'd in the stream, the stream 1020
Descended, and the Sun was wash'd away.

Then Gareth laid his lance athwart the ford;
So drew him home; but he that fought no more,
As being all bone-batter'd on the rock,
Yielded; and Gareth sent him to the King. 1025
'Myself when I return will plead for thee.'
'Lead, and I follow.' Quietly she led.
'Hath not the good wind, damsel, changed again?'
'Nay, not a point: nor art thou victor here.
There lies a ridge of slate across the ford; 1030
His horse thereon stumbled — ay, for I saw it.

"O Sun" (not this strong fool whom thou, Sir Knave,
Hast overthrown thro' mere unhappiness),
"O Sun, that wakenest all to bliss or pain,
O moon, that layest all to sleep again, 1035
Shine sweetly: twice my love hath smiled on me."

'What knowest thou of lovesong or of love?
Nay, nay, God wot, so thou wert nobly born,
Thou hast a pleasant presence. Yea, perchance, —

"O dewy flowers that open to the sun, 1040
O dewy flowers that close when day is done,
Blow sweetly: twice my love hath smiled on me."

'What knowest thou of flowers, except, belike,
To garnish meats with? hath not our good King
Who lent me thee, the flower of kitchendom, 1045
A foolish love for flowers? what stick ye round
The p̄asty? wherewithal deck the boar's head?
Flowers? nay, the boar hath rosemaries and bay.

"O birds that warble to the morning sky,
O birds that warble as the day goes by, 1050
Sing sweetly: twice my love hath smiled on me."

‘What knowest thou of birds, lark, mavis, merle,
Linnet?’ what dream ye when they utter forth
May-music growing with the growing light,
Their sweet sun-worship? these be for the snare 1055
(So runs thy fancy), these be for the spit,
Larding and basting. See thou have not now
Larded thy last, except thou turn and fly
There stands the third fool of their allegory.’

For there beyond a bridge of treble bow, 1060
All in a rose-red from the west, and all
Naked it seem’d, and glowing in the broad
Deep-dimpled current underneath, the knight,
That named himself the Star of Evening, stood.

And Gareth, ‘Wherefore waits the madman there 1065
Naked in open dayshine?’ ‘Nay,’ she cried,
‘Not naked, only wrapp’d in harden’d skins
That fit him like his own; and so ye cleave
His armor off him, these will turn the blade.’

Then the third brother shouted o’er the bridge, 1070
‘O brother-star, why shine ye here so slow?
Thy ward is higher up: but have ye slain
The damsel’s champion?’ and the damsel cried,

‘No star of thine, but shot from Arthur’s heaven
With all disaster unto thine and thee! 1075
For both thy younger brethren have gone down
Before this youth; and so wilt thou, Sir Star;
Art thou not old?’

‘Old, damsel, old and hard,
Old, with the might and breath of twenty boys.’
Said Gareth, ‘Old, and over-bold in brag! 1080

But that same strength which threw the Morning Star
Can throw the Evening.'

Then that other blew

A hard and deadly note upon the horn.

'Approach and arm me!' With slow steps from out

An old storm-beaten, russet, many-stain'd 1085

Pavilion, forth a grizzled damsel came,

And arm'd him in old arms, and brought a helm

With but a drying evergreen for crest,

And gave a shield whereon the Star of Even

Half-tarnish'd and half-bright, his emblem, shone. 1090

But when it glitter'd o'er the saddle-bow,

They madly hurl'd together on the bridge;

And Gareth overthrew him, lighted, drew,

There met him drawn, and overthrew him again,

But up like fire he started: and as oft 1095

As Gareth brought him grovelling on his knees,

So many a time he vaulted up again;

Till Gareth panted hard, and his great heart,

Foedooming all his trouble was in vain,

Labor'd within him, for he seem'd as one 1100

That all in later, sadder age begins

To war against ill uses of a life,

But these from all his life arise, and cry,

'Thou hast made us lords, and canst not put us down!'

He half-despairs: so Gareth seem'd to strike 1105

Vainly, the damsel clamoring all the while,

'Well done, knave-knight, well stricken, O good knight-
knave —

O knave, as noble as any of all the knights —

Shame me not, shame me not. I have prophesied —

Strike, thou art worthy of the Table Round — 1110

His arms are old, he trusts the harden'd skin —

Strike — strike — the wind will never change again.’
And Gareth hearing ever stronger smote,
And hew’d great pieces of his armor off him,
But lash’d in vain against the harden’d skin, 1115
And could not wholly bring him under, more
Than loud Southwesterns, rolling ridge on ridge,
The buoy that rides at sea, and dips and springs
Forever; till at length Sir Gareth’s brand
Clash’d his, and brake it utterly to the hilt. 1120
‘I have thee now;’ but forth that other sprang,
And, all unknightlike, writhed his wiry arms
Around him, till he felt, despite his mail,
Strangled, but straining even his uttermost
‘Cast, and so hurl’d him headlong o’er the bridge 1125
Down to the river, sink or swim, and cried,
‘Lead, and I follow.’

But the damsel said,
‘I lead no longer; ride thou at my side;
Thou art the kingliest of all kitchen-knaves.

‘“O trefoil, sparkling on the rainy plain, 1130
O rainbow with three colors after rain,
Shine sweetly; thrice my love has smiled on me.”

‘Sir, — and, good faith, I fain had added — Knight,
But that I heard thee call thyself a knave, —
Shamed am I that I so rebuked, reviled, 1135
Missaid thee; noble I am; and thought the King
Scorn’d me and mine; and now thy pardon, friend,
For thou hast ever answer’d courteously,
And wholly bold thou art, and meek withal
As any of Arthur’s best, but, being knave, 1140
Hast mazed my wit: I marvel what thou art.’

'Damsel,' he said, 'you be not all to blame,
 Saving that you mistrusted our good King
 Would handle scorn, or yield you, asking, one
 Not fit to cope your quest. You said your say ; 1145
 Mine answer was my deed. Good sooth ! I hold
 He scarce is knight, yea but half-man, nor meet
 To fight for gentle damsel, he, who lets
 His heart be stirr'd with any foolish heat
 At any gentle damsel's waywardness. 1150
 Shamed ? care not ! thy foul sayings fought for me :
 And seeing now thy words are fair, methinks
 There rides no knight, no Lancelot, his great self,
 Hath force to quell me.'

Nigh upon that hour
 When the lone hern forgets his melancholy, 1155
 Lets down his other leg, and stretching, dreams
 Of goodly supper in the distant pool,
 Then turn'd the noble damsel smiling at him,
 And told him of a cavern hard at hand,
 Where bread and baked meats and good red wine 1160
 Of southland, which the Lady Lyonors
 Had sent her coming champion, waited him.

Anon they past a narrow comb wherein
 Were slabs of rock with figures, knights on horse
 Sculptured, and deckt in slowly-waning hues. 1165
 'Sir Knave, my knight, a hermit once was here,
 Whose holy hand hath fashion'd on the rock
 The war of Time against the soul of man,
 And yon four fools have suck'd their allegory
 From these damp walls and taken but the form. 1170
 Know ye not these ? ' and Gareth look'd and read —
 In letters like to those the vexillary

Hath left crag-carven o'er the streaming Gelt —
 'PHOSPHORUS,' then, 'MERIDIES' — 'HESPERUS' —
 'NOX' — 'MORS,' beneath five figures, armed men. 1175
 Slab after slab, their faces forward all,
 And running down the Soul, a Shape that fled
 With broken wings, torn raiment and loose hair,
 For help and shelter to the hermit's cave.
 'Follow the faces, and we find it. Look, 1180
 Who comes behind?'

For one — delay'd at first

Thro' helping back the dislocated Kay
 To Camelot, then by what thereafter chanced,
 The damsel's headlong error thro' the wood —
 Sir Lancelot, having swum the river-loops — 1185
 His blue shield-lions cover'd — softly drew
 Behind the twain, and when he saw the star
 Glean, on Sir Gareth's turning to him, cried,
 'Stay, felon knight, I avenge me for my friend.'
 And Gareth crying prick'd against the cry; 1190
 But when they closed — in a moment — at one touch
 Of that skill'd spear, the wonder of the world —
 Went sliding down so easily, and fell,
 That when he found the grass within his hands
 He laugh'd; the laughter jarr'd upon Lynette: 1195
 Harshly she ask'd him, 'Shamed and overthrown,
 And tumbled back into the kitchen-knave,
 Why laugh ye? that ye blew your boast in vain?'
 'Nay, noble damsel, but that I, the son
 Of old King Lot and good Queen Bellicent, 1200
 And victor of the bridges and the ford,
 And knight of Arthur, here lie thrown by whom
 I know not, all thro' mere unhappiness —
 Device and sorcery and unhappiness —

Out, sword; we are thrown!' And Lancelot answer'd,

'Prince, 1205

O Gareth — thro' the mere unhappiness
Of one who came to help thee, not to harm,
Lancelot, and all as glad to find thee whole,
As on the day when Arthur knighted him.'

Then Gareth, 'Thou — Lancelot! — thine the hand 1210
That threw me? An some chance to mar the boast
Thy brethren of thee make — which could not chance —
Had sent thee down before a lesser spear,
Shamed had I been, and sad — O Lancelot — thou!'

Whereat the maiden, petulant, 'Lancelot, 1215
Why came ye not, when call'd? and wherefore now
Come ye, not call'd? I gloried in my knave,
Who being still rebuked, would answer still
Courteous as any knight — but now, if knight,
The marvel dies, and leaves me fool'd and trick'd 1220
And only wondering wherefore play'd upon:
And doubtful whether I and mine be scorn'd.
Where should be truth if not in Arthur's hall,
In Arthur's presence? Knight, knave, prince and fool,
I hate thee and forever.'

And Lancelot said, 1225
'Blessed be thou, Sir Gareth! knight art thou
To the King's best wish. O damsel, be you wise
To call him shamed, who is but overthrown?
Thrown have I been, nor once, but many a time.
Victor from vanquish'd issues at the last, 1230
And overthrower from being overthrown.
With sword we have not striven: and thy good horse
And thou are weary; yet not less I felt

Thy manhood thro' that wearied lance of thine.
Well hast thou done ; for all the stream is freed, 1235
And thou hast wreak'd his justice on his foes,
And when reviled, hast answer'd graciously,
And makest merry when overthrown. Prince, Knight,
Hail, Knight and Prince, and of our Table Round !'

And then when turning to Lynette he told 1240
The tale of Gareth, petulantly she said,
' Ay well — ay well — for worse than being fool'd
Of others, is to fool one's self. A cave,
Sir Lancelot, is hard by, with meats and drinks
And forage for the horse, and flint for fire. 1245
But all about it flies a honeysuckle.
Seek, till we find.' And when they sought and found,
Sir Gareth drank and ate, and all his life
Pass'd into sleep ; on whom the maiden gazed.
' Sound sleep be thine ! sound cause to sleep hast thou. 1250
Wake lusty ! Seem I not as tender to him
As any mother ? Ay, but such a one
As all day long hath rated at her child,
And vex'd his day, but blesses him asleep —
Good lord, how sweetly smells the honeysuckle 1255
In the hush'd night, as if the world were one
Of utter peace, and love, and gentleness !
O Lancelot, Lancelot' — and she clapt her hands —
' Full merry am I to find my goodly knave
Is knight and noble. See now, sworn have I, 1260
Else yon black felon had not let me pass,
To bring thee back to do the battle with him.
Thus an thou goest, he will fight thee first ;
Who doubts thee victor ? so will my knight-knave
Miss the full flower of this accomplishment.' 1265

Said Lancelot, 'Peradventure he, you name,
May know my shield. Let Gareth, an he will,
Change his for mine, and take my charger, fresh,
Not to be spurr'd, loving the battle as well
As he that rides him.' 'Lancelot-like,' she said, 1270
'Courteous in this, Lord Lancelot, as in all.'

And Gareth, wakening, fiercely clutch'd the shield;
'Ramp, ye lance-splintering lions, on whom all spears
Are rotten sticks! ye seem agape to roar!
Yea, ramp and roar at leaving of your lord! — 1275
'Care not, good beasts, so well I care for you.
O noble Lancelot, from my hold on these
Streams virtue — fire — thro' one that will not shame
Even the shadow of Lancelot under shield.
Hence: let us go.'

Silent the silent field 1280
They traversed. Arthur's harp tho' summer-wan,
In counter motion to the clouds, allured
The glance of Gareth dreaming on his liege.
A star shot: 'Lo,' said Gareth, 'the foe falls!'
An owl whoop'd: 'Hark the victor pealing there!' 1285
Suddenly she that rode upon his left
Clung to the shield that Lancelot lent him, crying,
'Yield, yield him this again; 'tis he must fight:
I curse the tongue that all thro' yesterday
Reviled thee, and hath wrought on Lancelot now 1290
To lend thee horse and shield: wonders ye have done;
Miracles ye cannot: here is glory enow
In having flung the three: I see thee maim'd,
Mangled: I swear thou canst not fling the fourth.'

'And wherefore, damsel? tell me all ye know. 1295
You cannot scare me; nor rough face, or voice,

Brute bulk of limb, or boundless savagery
Appal me from the quest.'

‘Nay, Prince,’ she cried,

'God wot, I never look'd upon the face,
Seeing he never rides abroad by day; 1300

But watch'd him have I like a phantom pass
Chilling the night: nor have I heard the voice.

Always he made his mouthpiece of a page
Who came and went, and still reported him
As closing in himself the strength of ten,

And when his anger tare him, massacring
Man, woman, lad and girl — yea, the soft babe:
Some hold that he hath swallow'd infant flesh,
Monster! O Prince, I went for Lancelot first,
The quest is Lancelot's: give him back the shield.' 1310

Said Gareth laughing, 'An he fight for this,
Belike he wins it as the better man:
Thus — and not else!'

But Lancelot on him urged
All the devisings of their chivalry
When one might meet a mightier than himself;
How best to manage horse, lance, sword, and shield,
And so fill up the gap where force might fail
With skill and fineness. Instant were his words.

Then Gareth, 'Here be rules. I know but one —
To dash against mine enemy and to win. 1320
Yet have I watch'd thee victor in the joust,
And seen thy way.' 'Heaven help thee,' sigh'd Lynette.

Then for a space, and under cloud that grew
To thunder-gloom palling all stars, they rode

In converse till she made her palfrey halt, 1325
Lifted an arm, and softly whisper'd, 'There.'
And all the three were silent seeing, pitch'd
Beside the Castle Perilous on flat field,
A huge pavilion like a mountain peak
Sunder the glooming crimson on the marge, 1330
Black, with black banner, and a long black horn
Beside it hanging; which Sir Gareth grasp'd,
And so, before the two could hinder him,
Sent all his heart and breath thro' all the horn.
Echoed the walls; a light twinkled; anon 1335
Came lights and lights, and once again he blew;
Whereon were hollow tramlings up and down
And muffled voices heard, and shadows past;
Till high above him, circled with her maids,
The Lady Lyonors at a window stood, 1340
Beautiful among lights, and waving to him
White hands, and courtesy; but when the Prince
Three times had blown — after long hush — at last —
The huge pavilion slowly yielded up.
Thro' those black foldings, that which housed therein. 1345
High on a nightblack horse, in nightblack arms,
With white breast-bone, and barren ribs of Death,
And crown'd with fleshless laughter — some ten steps —
In the half-light — thro' the dim dawn — advanced
The monster, and then paused, and spake no word. 1350

But Gareth spake and all indignantly,
'Fool, for thou hast, men say, the strength of ten,
Canst thou not trust the limbs thy God hath given,
But must, to make the terror of thee more,
Trick thyself out in ghastly imageries 1355
Of that which Life hath done with, and the clod,

Less dull than thou, will hide with mantling flowers
As if for pity ? ' But he spake no word ;
Which set the horror higher : a maiden swoon'd ;
The Lady Lyonors wrung her hands and wept, 1360
As doom'd to be the bride of Night and Death ;
Sir Gareth's head prickled beneath his helm ;
And even Sir Lancelot thro' his warm blood felt
Ice strike, and all that mark'd him were aghast.
At once Sir Lancelot's charger fiercely neigh'd 1365
And Death's dark war-horse bounded forward with him.
Then those that did not blink the terror, saw
That Death was cast to ground, and slowly rose.
But with one stroke Sir Gareth split the skull.
Half fell to right and half to left and lay. 1370
Then with a stronger buffet he clove the helm
As thoroughly as the skull ; and out from this
Issued the bright face of a blooming boy
Fresh as a flower new-born, and crying, ' Knight,
Slay me not : my three brethren bade me do it, 1375
To make a horror all about the house,
And stay the world from Lady Lyonors.
They never dream'd the passes would be pass'd.'
Answer'd Sir Gareth graciously to one
Not many a moon his younger, ' My fair child, 1380
What madness made thee challenge the chief knight
Of Arthur's hall ? ' ' Fair Sir, they bade me do it.
They hate the King, and Lancelot, the King's friend,
They hoped to slay him somewhere on the stream,
They never dream'd the passes could be pass'd.' 1385

Then sprang the happier day from underground ;
And Lady Lyonors and her house, with dance
And revel and song, made merry over Death,

As being after all their foolish fears
And horrors only proven a blooming boy.
So large mirth lived and Gareth won the quest.

1390

And he that told the tale in older times
Says that Sir Gareth wedded Lyonors,
But he that told it later, says Lynette.

LANCELOT AND ELAINE.

ELAINE the fair, Elaine the loveable,
Elaine, the lily maid of Astolat,
High in her chamber up a tower to the east
Guarded the sacred shield of Lancelot;
Which first she placed where morning's earliest ray 5
Might strike it, and awake her with the gleam;
Then fearing rust or soilure fashion'd for it
A case of silk, and braided thereupon
All the devices blazon'd on the shield
In their own tinct, and added, of her wit, 10
A border fantasy of branch and flower,
And yellow-throated nestling in the nest.
Nor rested thus content, but day by day,
Leaving her household and good father, climb'd
That eastern tower, and entering barr'd her door, 15
Stripp'd off the case, and read the naked shield,
Now guess'd a hidden meaning in his arms,
Now made a pretty history to herself
Of every dint a sword had beaten in it,
And every scratch a lance had made upon it, 20
Conjecturing when and where: this cut is fresh;
That ten years back: this dealt him at Caerlyle;
That at Caerleon; this at Camelot:
And ah God's mercy, what a stroke was there!
And here a thrust that might have kill'd, but God 25
Broke the strong lance, and roll'd his enemy down,
And saved him: so she lived in fantasy.

How came the lily maid by that good shield
Of Lancelot, she that knew not even his name?

He left it with her, when he rode to tilt 30
For the great diamond in the diamond jousts,
Which Arthur had ordain'd, and by that name
Had named them, since a diamond was the prize.

For Arthur, long before they crown'd him King,
Roving the trackless realms of Lyonesse, 35
Had found a glen, gray boulder and black tarn.
A horror lived about the tarn, and clave
Like its own mists to all the mountain side:
For here two brothers, one a king, had met
And fought together; but their names were lost; 40
And each had slain his brother at a blow;
And down they fell and made the glen abhorr'd:
And there they lay till all their bones were bleach'd,
And lichen'd into color with the crags:
And he, that once was a king, had on a crown 45
Of diamonds, one in front, and four aside.
And Arthur came, and laboring up the pass,
All in a misty moonshine, unawares
Had trodden that crown'd skeleton, and the skull
Brake from the nape, and from the skull the crown 50
Roll'd into light, and turning on its rims
Fled like a glittering rivulet to the tarn:
And down the shingly scaur he plunged, and caught,
And set it on his head, and in his heart
Heard murmurs, 'Lo, thou likewise shalt be King.' 55

Thereafter, when a King, he had the gems
Pluck'd from the crown, and show'd them to his knights,
Saying, 'These jewels, whereupon I chanced
Divinely, are the kingdom's, not the King's —
For public use; henceforward let there be, 60

Once every year, a joust for one of these :
For so by nine years' proof we need must learn
Which is our mightiest, and ourselves shall grow
In use of arms and manhood, till we drive
The heathen, who, some say, shall rule the land 65
Hereafter, which God hinder.' Thus he spoke :
And eight years pass'd, eight jousts had been, and still
Had Lancelot won the diamond of the year,
With purpose to present them to the Queen,
When all were won ; but meaning all at once 70
To snare her royal fancy with a boon
Worth half her realm, had never spoken word.

Now for the central diamond and the last
And largest, Arthur, holding then his court
Hard on the river nigh the place which now 75
Is this world's hugest, let proclaim a joust
At Camelot, and when the time drew nigh
Spake (for she had been sick) to Guinevere,
'Are you so sick, my Queen, you cannot move
To these fair jousts ?' 'Yea, lord,' she said, 'ye know it.' 80
'Then will ye miss,' he answer'd, 'the great deeds
Of Lancelot, and his prowess in the lists,
A sight ye love to look on.' And the Queen
Lifted her eyes, and they dwelt languidly
On Lancelot, where he stood beside the King. 85
He thinking that he read her meaning there,
'Stay with me, I am sick ; my love is more
Than many diamonds,' yielded : and a heart
Love-loyal to the least wish of the Queen
(However much he yearn'd to make complete 90
The tale of diamonds for his destined boon)
Urged him to speak against the truth, and say,

‘Sir King, mine ancient wound is hardly whole,
And lets me from the saddle;’ and the King
Glanced first at him, then her, and went his way. 95
No sooner gone than suddenly she began :

‘To blame, my lord Sir Lancelot, much to blame !
Why go ye not to these fair jousts ? the knights
Are half of them our enemies, and the crowd
Will murmur, “ Lo the shameless ones, who take 100
Their pastime now the trustful King is gone ! ” ’
Then Lancelot, vex’d at having lied in vain :
‘Are ye so wise ? ye were not once so wise,
My Queen, that summer, when ye loved me first.
Then of the crowd ye took no more account 105
Than of the myriad cricket of the mead,
When its own voice clings to each blade of grass,
And every voice is nothing. As to knights,
Them surely can I silence with all ease.
But now my loyal worship is allow’d 110
Of all men : many a bard, without offence,
Has link’d our names together in his lay,
Lancelot, the flower of bravery, Guinevere,
The pearl of beauty ; and our knights at feast
Have pledged us in this union, while the King 115
Would listen smiling. How then ? is there more ?
Has Arthur spoken aught ? or would yourself,
Now weary of my service and devoir,
Henceforth be truer to your faultless lord ? ’

She broke into a little scornful laugh : 120
‘Arthur, my lord, Arthur, the faultless King,
That passionate perfection, my good lord —
But who can gaze upon the Sun in heaven ?

He never spake word of reproach to me,
 He never had a glimpse of mine untruth, 125
 He cares not for me: only here to-day
 There gleam'd a vague suspicion in his eyes:
 Some meddling rogue has tamper'd with him — else
 Rapt in this fancy of his Table Round,
 And swearing men to vows impossible, 130
 To make them like himself: but, friend, to me
 He is all fault who hath no fault at all:
 For who loves me must have a touch of earth;
 The low sun makes the color: I am yours,
 Not Arthur's, as ye know, save by the bond. 135
 And therefore hear my words: go to the jousts:
 The tiny-trumpeting gnat can break our dream
 When sweetest; and the vermin voices here
 May buzz so loud — we scorn them, but they sting.'

Then answer'd Lancelot, the chief of knights: 140
 'And with what face, after my pretext made,
 Shall I appear, O Queen, at Camelot, I
 Before a King who honors his own word
 As if it were his God's?'

'Yea,' said the Queen,
 'A moral child without the craft to rule, 145
 Else had he not lost me: but listen to me,
 If I must find you wit: we hear it said
 That men go down before your spear at a touch,
 But knowing you are Lancelot; your great name,
 This conquers: hide it therefore; go unknown: 150
 Win! by this kiss you will; and our true King
 Will then allow your pretext, O my knight,
 As all for glory; for to speak him true,

Ye know right well, how meek soe'er he seem,
No keener hunter after glory breathes. 155
He loves it in his knights more than himself:
Then prove to him his work: win and return.'

Then got Sir Lancelot suddenly to horse,
Wroth at himself. Not willing to be known,
He left the barren-beaten thoroughfare 160
Chose the green path that show'd the rarer foot,
And there among the solitary downs,
Full often lost in fancy, lost his way;
Till as he traced a faintly-shadow'd track,
That all in loops and links among the dales 165
Ran to the Castle of Astolat, he saw
Fired from the west, far on a hill, the towers.
Thither he made, and blew the gateway horn.
Then came an old, dumb, myriad-wrinkled man,
Who let him into lodging and disarm'd. 170
And Lancelot marvell'd at the wordless man;
And issuing found the Lord of Astolat
With two strong sons, Sir Torre and Sir Lavaine,
Moving to meet him in the castle court;
And close behind them stept the lily maid 175
Elaine, his daughter: mother of the house
There was not: some light jest among them rose
With laughter dying down as the great knight
Approach'd them: then the Lord of Astolat:
'Whence comest thou, my guest, and by what name 180
Livest between the lips? for by thy state
And presence I might guess thee chief of those,
After the King, who eat in Arthur's halls.
Him have I seen: the rest, his Table Round,
Known as they are, to me they are unknown.' 185

Then answer'd Lancelot, the chief of knights :
 'Known am I, and of Arthur's hall, and known,
 What I by mere mischance have brought, my shield.
 But since I go to joust as one unknown
 At Camelot for the diamond, ask me not, 190
 Hereafter ye shall know me — and the shield —
 I pray you lend me one, if such you have,
 Blank, or at least with some device not mine.'

Then said the Lord of Astolat, 'Here is Torre's:
 Hurt in his first tilt was my son, Sir Torre. 195
 And so, God wot, his shield is blank enough.
 His ye can have.' Then added plain Sir Torre,
 'Yea, since I cannot use it, ye may have it.'
 Here laugh'd the father saying, 'Fie, Sir Churl,
 Is that an answer for a noble knight? 200
 Allow him ! but Lavaine, my younger here,
 He is so full of lustihood, he will ride,
 Joust for it, and win, and bring it in an hour,
 And set it in this damsel's golden hair,
 To make her thrice as wilful as before.' 205

'Nay, father, nay, good father, shame me not
 Before this noble knight,' said young Lavaine,
 'For nothing. Surely I but play'd on Torre:
 He seem'd so sullen, vex'd he could not go :
 A jest, no more ! for, knight, the maiden dreamt 210
 That some one put this diamond in her hand,
 And that it was too slippery to be held,
 And slipt and fell into some pool or stream,
 The castle-well, belike ; and then I said
 That *if* I went and *if* I fought and won it 215
 (But all was jest and joke among ourselves)

Then must she keep it safelier. All was jest.
But, father, give me leave, an if he will,
To ride to Camelot with this noble knight :
Win shall I not, but do my best to win : 220
Young as I am, yet would I do my best.'

'So ye will grace me,' answer'd Lancelot,
Smiling a moment, 'with your fellowship
O'er these waste downs whereon I lost myself,
Then were I glad of you as guide and friend : 225
And you shall win this diamond, — as I hear,
It is a fair large diamond, — if ye may,
And yield it to this maiden, if ye will.'
'A fair large diamond,' added plain Sir Torre,
'Such be for queens, and not for simple maids.' 230
Then she, who held her eyes upon the ground,
Elaine, and heard her name so tost about,
Flush'd slightly at the slight disparagement
Before the stranger knight, who, looking at her,
Full courtly, yet not falsely, thus return'd : 235
'If what is fair be but for what is fair,
And only queens are to be counted so,
Rash were my judgment then, who deem this maid
Might wear as fair a jewel as is on earth,
Not violating the bond of like to like.' 240

He spoke and ceased : the lily maid Elaine,
Won by the mellow voice before she look'd,
Lifted her eyes and read his lineaments.
The great and guilty love he bare the Queen,
In battle with the love he bare his lord, 245
Had marr'd his face, and mark'd it ere his time.
Another sinning on such heights with one,

The flower of all the west and all the world,
 Had been the sleeker for it: but in him
 His mood was often like a fiend, and rose 250
 And drove him into wastes and solitudes
 For agony, who was yet a living soul.
 Marr'd as he was, he seem'd the goodliest man
 That ever among ladies ate in hall,
 And noblest, when she lifted up her eyes. 255
 However marr'd, of more than twice her years,
 Seam'd with an ancient swordcut on the cheek,
 And bruised and bronzed, she lifted up her eyes
 And loved him, with that love which was her doom.

Then the great knight, the darling of the court, 260
 Loved of the loveliest, into that rude hall
 Stepp'd with all grace, and not with half disdain
 Hid under grace, as in a smaller time,
 But kindly man moving among his kind:
 Whom they with meats and vintage of their best 265
 And talk and minstrel melody entertain'd.
 And much they ask'd of court and Table Round,
 And ever well and readily answer'd he;
 But Lancelot, when they glanced at Guinevere,
 Suddenly speaking of the wordless man, 270
 Heard from the Baron that, ten years before,
 The heathen caught and reft him of his tongue.
 'He learnt and warn'd me of their fierce design
 Against my house, and him they caught and maim'd *
 But I, my sons, and little daughter fled 275
 From bonds or death, and dwelt among the woods
 By the great river in a boatman's hut.
 Dull days were those, till our good Arthur broke
 The Pagan yet once more on Badon hill.'

‘O there, great lord, doubtless,’ Lavaine said, rapt 280
 By all the sweet and sudden passion of youth
 Toward greatness in its elder, ‘You have fought.
 O tell us — for we live apart — you know
 Of Arthur’s glorious wars.’ And Lancelot spoke
 And answer’d him at full, as having been 285
 With Arthur in the fight which all day long
 Rang by the white mouth of the violent Glem;
 And in the four loud battles by the shore
 Of Duglas; that on Bassa; then the war
 That thunder’d in and out the glomy skirts 290
 Of Celidon the forest; and again
 By castle Gurnion, where the glorious King
 Had on his cuirass worn our Lady’s Head,
 Carved of one emerald center’d in a sun
 Of silver rays, that lighten’d as he breathed; 295
 And at Caerleon had he help’d his lord,
 When the strong neighings of the wild white Horse
 Set every gilded parapet shuddering;
 And up in Agned-Cathregonion too,
 And down the waste sand-shores of Trath Treroit, 300
 Where many a heathen fell; ‘and on the mount
 Of Badon I myself beheld the King
 Charge at the head of all his Table Round,
 And all his legions crying Christ and him,
 And break them; and I saw him, after, stand 305
 High on a heap of slain, from spur to plume
 Red as the rising sun with heathen blood,
 And seeing me, with a great voice he cried,
 “They are broken, they are broken!” for the King,
 However mild he seems at home, nor cares 310
 For triumph in our mimic wars, the jousts —
 For if his own knight cast him down, he laughs

Saying, his knights are better men than he —
 Yet in this heathen war the fire of God
 Fills him: I never saw his like: there lives 315
 No greater leader.'

While he utter'd this,
 Low to her own heart said the lily maid,
 'Save your great self, fair lord;' and when he fell
 From talk of war to traits of pleasantry —
 Being mirthful he, but in a stately kind — 320
 She still took note that when the living smile
 Died from his lips, across him came a cloud
 Or melancholy severe, from which again,
 Whenever in her hovering to and fro
 The lily maid had striven to make him cheer, 325
 There brake a sudden-beaming tenderness
 Of manners and of nature: and she thought
 That all was nature, all, perchance, for her.
 And all night long his face before her lived,
 As when a painter, poring on a face, 330
 Divinely thro' all hindrance finds the man
 Behind it, and so paints him that his face,
 The shape and color of a mind and life,
 Lives for his children, ever at its best
 And fullest; so the face before her lived, 335
 Dark-splendid, speaking in the silence, full
 Of noble things, and held her from her sleep.
 Till rathe she rose, half-cheated in the thought
 She needs must bid farewell to sweet Lavaine.
 First as in fear, step after step, she stole 340
 Down the long tower-stairs, hesitating:
 Anon, she heard Sir Lancelot cry in the court,
 'This shield, my friend, where is it?' and Lavaine

Pass'd inward, as she came from out the tower,
There to his proud horse Lancelot turn'd, and smooth'd 345
The glossy shoulder, humming to himself.
Half-envious of the flattering hand, she drew
Nearer and stood. He look'd, and more amazed
Than if seven men had set upon him, saw
The maiden standing in the dewy light. 350
He had not dream'd she was so beautiful.
Then came on him a sort of sacred fear,
For silent, tho' he greeted her, she stood
Rapt on his face as if it were a God's.
Suddenly flash'd on her a wild desire, 355
That he should wear her favor at the tilt.
She braved a riotous heart in asking for it.
'Fair lord, whose name I know not — noble it is,
I well believe, the noblest — will you wear
My favor at this tourney?' 'Nay,' said he, 360
'Fair lady, since I never yet have worn
Favor of any lady in the lists.
Such is my wont, as those, who know me, know.'
'Yea, so,' she answer'd; 'then in wearing mine
Needs must be lesser likelihood, noble lord, 365
That those who know should know you.' And he turn'd
Her counsel up and down within his mind,
And found it true, and answer'd, 'True, my child.
Well, I will wear it: fetch it out to me:
What is it?' and she told him 'A red sleeve 370
Broider'd with pearls,' and brought it: then he bound
Her token on his helmet, with a smile
Saying, 'I never yet have done so much
For any maiden living,' and the blood
Sprang to her face and fill'd her with delight; 375
But left her all the paler, when Lavaine

Returning brought the yet-unblazon'd shield,
 His brother's; which he gave to Lancelot,
 Who parted with his own to fair Elaine :
 'Do me this grace, my child, to have my shield 380
 In keeping till I come.' 'A grace to me,'
 She answer'd, 'twice to-day. I am your squire !'
 Whereat Lavaine said, laughing, 'Lily maid,
 For fear our people call you lily maid
 In earnest, let me bring your color back ; 385
 Once, twice, and thrice : now get you hence to bed ;'
 So kiss'd her, and Sir Lancelot his own hand,
 And thus they moved away : she stay'd a minute,
 Then made a sudden step to the gate, and there —
 Her bright hair blown about the serious face 390
 Yet rosy-kindled with her brother's kiss —
 Paused by the gateway, standing near the shield
 In silence, while she watch'd their arms far-off
 Sparkle, until they dip'd below the downs.
 Then to her tower she climb'd, and took the shield, 395
 There kept it, and so lived in fantasy.

Meanwhile the new companions pass'd away
 Far o'er the long backs of the bushless downs,
 To where Sir Lancelot knew there lived a knight
 Not far from Camelot, now for forty years 400
 A hermit, who had pray'd, labor'd and pray'd,
 And ever laboring had scoop'd himself
 In the white rock a chapel and a hall
 On massive columns, like a shorecliff cave,
 And cells and chambers : all were fair and dry ; 405
 The green light from the meadows underneath
 Struck up and lived along the milky roofs ;
 And in the meadows tremulous aspen-trees

And poplars made a noise of falling showers.
And thither wending there that night they bode. 410

But when the next day broke from underground,
And shot red fire and shadows thro' the cave,
They rose, heard mass, broke fast, and rode away :
Then Lancelot saying, 'Hear, but hold my name
Hidden, you ride with Lancelot of the Lake,' 415
Abash'd Lavaine, whose instant reverence,
Dearer to true young hearts than their own praise,
But left him leave to stammer. 'Is it indeed !'
And after muttering, 'The great Lancelot.'
At last he got his breath and answered, 'One, 420
One have I seen —that other, our liege lord,
The dread Pendragon, Britain's King of kings.
Of whom the people talk mysteriously,
He will be there —then were I stricken blind
That minute, I might say that I had seen.' 425

So spake Lavaine, and when they reach'd the lists
By Camelot in the meadow, let his eyes
Run thro' the peopled gallery which half round
Lay like a rainbow fall'n upon the grass,
Until they found the clear-faced King, who sat 430
Robed in red samite, easily to be known,
Since to his crown the golden dragon clung,
And down his robe the dragon writhed in gold,
And from the carven-work behind him crept
Two dragons gilded, sloping down to make 435
Arms for his chair, while all the rest of them
Thro' knots and loops and folds innumerable
Fled ever thro' the woodwork, till they found
The new design wherein they lost themselves,

Yet with all ease, so tender was the work : 440
And, in the costly canopy o'er him set,
Blazed the last diamond of the nameless king.

Then Lancelot answer'd young Lavaine and said,
'Me you call great: mine is the firmer seat,
The truer lance: but there is many a youth 445
Now crescent, who will come to all I am
And overcome it; and in me there dwells
No greatness, save it be some far-off touch
Of greatness to know well I am not great:
There is the man.' And Lavaine gaped upon him 450
As on a thing miraculous, and anon
The trumpets blew; and then did either side,
They that assail'd and they that held the lists,
Set lance in rest, strike spur, suddenly move,
Meet in the midst, and there so furiously 455
Shock, that a man far-off might well perceive,
If any man that day were left afield,
The hard earth shake, and a low thunder of arms.
And Lancelot bode a little, till he saw
Which were the weaker; then he hurl'd into it 460
Against the stronger: little need to speak
Of Lancelot in his glory! King, duke, earl,
Count, baron — whom he smote, he overthrew.

But in the field were Lancelot's kith and kin,
Ranged with the Table Round that held the lists, 465
Strong men, and wrathful that a stranger knight
Should do and almost overdo the deeds
Of Lancelot; and one said to the other, 'Lo!
What is he? I do not mean the force alone —
The grace and versatility of the man! 470

Is it not Lancelot ? ' ' When has Lancelot worn
Favor of any lady in the lists ?

Not such his wout, as we, that know him, know.'

'How then ? who then ?' a fury seized them all,

A fiery family passion for the name

475

Of Lancelot, and a glory one with theirs.

✓ They couch'd their spears and prick'd their steeds, and thus,

Their plumes driv'n backward by the wind they made

In moving, altogether down upon him

Bare, as a wild wave in the wide North-sea,

480

Green-glimmering toward the summit, bears, with all

Its stormy crests that smoke against the skies,

Down on a bark, and overbears the bark,

And him that helms it, so they overbore

Sir Lancelot and his charger, and a spear

485

Down-glancing lamed the charger, and a spear

Prick'd sharply his own cuirass, and the head

Pierced thro' his side, and there snapp'd, and remain'd.

Then Sir Lavaine did well and worshipfully ;

He bore a knight of old repute to the earth,

490

And brought his horse to Lancelot where he lay.

He up the side, sweating with agony, got,

But thought to do while he might yet endure,

And being lustily holpen by the rest,

His party, — tho' it seem'd half-miracle

495

To those he fought with, — drave his kith and kin,

And all the Table Round that held the lists,

Back to the barrier ; then the trumpets blew

Proclaiming his the prize, who wore the sleeve

Of scarlet, and the pearls ; and all the knights,

500

His party, cried ' Advance and take thy prize,

The diamond ; ' but he answer'd ' Diamond me

No diamonds! for God's love, a little air!
 Prize me no prizes, for my prize is death!
 Hence will I, and I charge you, follow me not.' 505

He spoke, and vanish'd suddenly from the field
 With young Lavaine into the poplar grove.
 There from his charger down he slid, and sat,
 Gasping to Sir Lavaine, 'Draw the lance-head;'
 'Ah my sweet lord Sir Lancelot,' said Lavaine, 510
 'I dread me, if I draw it, you will die.'
 But he, 'I die already with it: draw—
 Draw,'—and Lavaine drew, and Sir Lancelot gave
 A marvellous great shriek and ghastly groan,
 And half his blood burst forth, and down he sank 515
 For the pure pain, and wholly swoon'd away.
 Then came the hermit out and bare him in,
 There stanch'd his wound; and there, in daily doubt
 Whether to live or die, for many a week
 Hid from the wide world's rumor by the grove 520
 Of poplars with their noise of falling showers,
 And ever-tremulous aspen-trees, he lay.

But on that day when Lancelot fled the lists,
 His party, knights of utmost North and West,
 Lords of waste marches, kings of desolate isles, 525
 Came round their great Pendragon, saying to him,
 'Lo, Sire, our knight, thro' whom we won the day,
 Hath gone sore wounded, and hath left his prize
 Untaken, crying that his prize is death.'
 'Heaven hinder,' said the King, 'that such an one, 530
 So great a knight as we have seen to day—
 He seem'd to me another Lancelot—
 Yea, twenty times I thought him Lancelot—

He must not pass uncared for. Wherefore, rise,
O Gawain, and ride forth and find the knight. 535
Wounded and wearied needs must he be near.
I charge you that you get at once to horse.
And, knights and kings, there breathes not one of you
Will deem this prize of ours is rashly given:
His prowess was too wondrous. We will do him 540
No customary honor: since the knight
Came not to us, of us to claim the prize,
Ourselves will send it after. Rise and take
This diamond, and deliver it, and return,
And bring us where he is, and how he fares, 545
And cease not from your quest until ye find.²

So saying, from the carven flower above,
To which it made a restless heart, he took,
And gave, the diamond: then from where he sat
At Arthur's right, with smiling face arose, 550
With smiling face and frowning heart, a Prince
In the mid night and flourish of his May,
Gawain, surnamed The Courteous, fair and strong,
And after Lancelot, Tristram, and Geraint
And Gareth, a good knight, but therewithal 555
Sir Modred's brother, and the child of Lot,
Nor often loyal to his word, and now
Wroth that the King's command to sally forth
In quest of whom he knew not, made him leave
The banquet, and concourse of knights and kings. 560

So all in wrath he got to horse and went;
While Arthur to the banquet, dark in mood,
Pass'd, thinking 'Is it Lancelot who hath come
Despite the wound he spake of, all for gain

Of glory, and hath added wound to wound, 565
 And ridd'n away to die?' So fear'd the King,
 And, after two days' tarriance there, return'd.
 Then when he saw the Queen, embracing ask'd,
 'Love, are you yet so sick?' 'Nay, lord,' she said.
 'And where is Lancelot?' Then the Queen amazed, 570
 'Was he not with you? won he not your prize?'
 'Nay, but one like him.' 'Why, that like was he.'
 And when the King demanded how she knew,
 Said, 'Lord, no sooner had ye parted from us,
 Than Lancelot told me of a common talk 575
 That men went down before his spear at a touch,
 But knowing he was Lancelot; his great name
 Conquer'd; and therefore would he hide his name
 From all men, even the King, and to this end
 Had made the pretext of a hindering wound, 580
 That he might joust unknown of all, and learn
 If his old prowess were in aught decay'd;
 And added, "Our true Arthur, when he learns,
 Will well allow my pretext, as for gain
 Of purer glory."'

Then replied the King: 585
 'Far lovelier in our Lancelot had it been,
 In lieu of idly dallying with the truth,
 To have trusted me as he hath trusted thee.
 Surely his King and most familiar friend
 Might well have kept his secret. True, indeed, 590
 Albeit I know my knights fantastical,
 So fine a fear in our large Lancelot
 Must needs have moved my laughter: now remains
 But little cause for laughter: his own kin—
 Ill news, my Queen, for all who love him, this!— 595

His kith and kin, not knowing, set upon him
 So that he went sore wounded from the field:
 Yet good news too: for goodly hopes are mine
 That Lancelot is no more a lonely heart.
 He wore, against his wont, upon his helm
 A sleeve of scarlet, broider'd with great pearls,
 Some gentle maiden's gift.'

600

 'Yea, lord,' she said,
 'Thy hopes are mine,' and saying that, she choked,
 And sharply turn'd about to hide her face,
 Pass'd to her chamber, and there flung herself
 Down on the great King's couch, and writhed upon it,
 And clench'd her fingers till they bit the palm,
 And shriek'd out, 'Traitor,' to the unhearing wall,
 Then flash'd into wild tears, and rose again,
 And moved about her palace, proud and pale.

605

610

Gawain the while thro' all the region round
 Rode with his diamond, wearied of the quest,
 Touch'd at all points, except the poplar grove,
 And came at last, tho' late, to Astolat:
 Whom glittering in enamell'd arms the maid
 Glanced at, and cried, 'What news from Camelot, lord?
 What of the knight with the red sleeve?' 'He won.'
 'I knew it,' she said. 'But parted from the jousts
 Hurt in the side,' whereat she caught her breath;
 Thro' her own side she felt the sharp lance go;
 Thereon she smote her hand: wellnigh she swoon'd:
 And, while he gazed wonderingly at her, came
 The Lord of Astolat out, to whom the Prince
 Reported who he was, and on what quest
 Sent, that he bore the prize and could not find
 The victor, but had ridd'n a random round

615

620

625

To seek him, and had wearied of the search.
 To whom the Lord of Astolat, 'Bide with us,
 And ride no more at random, noble Prince !
 Here was the knight, and here he left a shield ; 630
 This will he send or come for ; furthermore,
 Our son is with him ; we shall hear anon,
 Needs must we hear.' To this the courteous Prince
 Accorded with his wonted courtesy,
 Courtesy with a touch of traitor in it, 635
 And stay'd ; and cast his eyes on fair Elaine :
 Where could be found face daintier ? then her shape
 From forehead down to foot, perfect — again
 From foot to forehead exquisitely turn'd :
 ' Well — if I bide, lo ! this wild flower for me ! ' 640
 And oft they met among the garden yews,
 And there he set himself to play upon her
 With sallying wit, free flashes from a height
 Above her, graces of the court, and songs,
 Sighs, and slow smiles, and golden eloquence 645
 And amorous adulation, till the maid
 Rebell'd against it, saying to him, ' Prince,
 O loyal nephew of our noble King,
 Why ask you not to see the shield he left,
 Whence you might learn his name ? Why slight your King,
 And lose the quest he sent you on, and prove 651
 No surer than our falcon yesterday,
 Who lost the hern we slipp'd her at, and went
 To all the winds ? ' ' Nay, by mine head,' said he,
 ' I lose it, as we lose the lark in heaven, 655
 O damsel, in the light of your blue eyes ;
 But an ye will it let me see the shield.'
 And when the shield was brought, and Gawain saw
 Sir Lancelot's azure lions, crown'd with gold,

Ramp in the field, he smote his thigh, and mock'd : 660
‘ Right was the King ! our Lancelot ! that true man ! ’
‘ And right was I,’ she answer'd merrily, ‘ I,
Who dream'd my knight the greatest knight of all.’
‘ And if I dream'd,’ said Gawain, ‘ that you love
This greatest knight, your pardon ! lo, ye know it ! 665
Speak therefore : shall I waste myself in vain ? ’
Full simple was her answer, ‘ What know I ?
My brethren have been all my fellowship ;
And I, when often they have talk'd of love,
Wish'd it had been my mother, for they talk'd, 670
Meseem'd, of what they knew not : so myself —
I know not if I know what true love is,
But if I know, then, if I love not him,
I know there is none other I can love.’
‘ Yea, by God's death,’ said he, ‘ ye love him well,
But would not, knew ye what all others know,
And whom he loves.’ ‘ So be it,’ cried Elaine,
And lifted her fair face and moved away :
But he pursued her, calling, ‘ Stay a little !
One golden minute's grace ! he wore your sleeve : 680
Would he break faith with one I may not name ?
Must our true man change like a leaf at last ?
Nay — like enow : why then, far be it from me
To cross our mighty Lancelot in his loves !
And, damsel, for I deem you know full well 685
Where your great knight is hidden, let me leave
My quest with you : the diamond also : here !
For if you love, it will be sweet to give it ;
And if he love, it will be sweet to have it
From your own hand : and whether he love or not, 690
A diamond is a diamond. Fare you well
A thousand times ! — a thousand times farewell !

Yet, if he love, and his love hold, we two
May meet at court hereafter: there, I think,
So ye will learn the courtesies of the court, 695
We two shall know each other.'

Then he gave,
And slightly kiss'd the hand to which he gave,
The diamond, and all wearied of the quest
Leapt on his horse, and carolling as he went
A true-love ballad, lightly rode away. 700

Thence to the court he pass'd: there told the King
What the King knew, 'Sir Lancelot is the knight.'
And added, 'Sire, my liege, so much I learnt;
But fail'd to find him, tho' I rode all round
The region: but I lighted on the maid 705
Whose sleeve he wore; she loves him; and to her,
Deeming our courtesy is the truest law,
I gave the diamond: she will render it;
For by mine head she knows his hiding-place.'

The seldom-frowning King frown'd, and replied, 710
'Too courteous truly! ye shall go no more
On quest of mine, seeing that ye forget
Obedience is the courtesy due to kings.'

He spake and parted. Wroth, but all in awe,
For twenty strokes of the blood, without a word, 715
Linger'd that other, staring after him;
Then shook his hair, strode off, and buzz'd abroad
About the maid of Astolat, and her love.
All ears were prick'd at once, all tongues were loosed:
'The maid of Astolat loves Sir Lancelot, 720
Sir Lancelot loves the maid of Astolat.'

Some read the King's face, some the Queen's, and all
 Had marvel what the maid might be, but most
 Predoom'd her as unworthy. One old dame
 Came suddenly on the Queen with the sharp news. 725
 She, that had heard the noise of it before,
 But sorrowing Lancelot should have stoop'd so low,
 Marr'd her friend's aim with pale tranquillity.
 So ran the tale like fire about the court,
 Fire in dry stubble a nine-days' wonder flared : 730
 Till even the knights at banquet twice or thrice
 Forgot to drink to Lancelot and the Queen,
 And pledging Lancelot and the lily maid
 Smiled at each other, while the Queen, who sat
 With lips severely placid, felt the knot 735
 Climb in her throat, and with her feet unseen
 Crush'd the wild passion out against the floor
 Beneath the banquet, where the meats became
 As wormwood, and she hated all who pledged.

But far away the maid in Astolat, 740
 Her guiltless rival, she that ever kept
 The one-day-seen Sir Lancelot in her heart,
 Crept to her father, while he mused alone,
 Sat on his knee, stroked his gray face and said,
 'Father, you call me wilful, and the fault 745
 Is yours who let me have my will, and now,
 Sweet father, will you let me lose my wits?'
 'Nay,' said he, 'surely.' 'Wherefore, let me hence,'
 She answer'd, 'and find out our dear Lavaine.'
 'Ye will not lose your wits for dear Lavaine : 750
 Bide,' answer'd he : 'we needs must hear anon
 Of him, and of that other.' 'Ay,' she said,
 'And of that other, for I needs must hence

And find that other, wheresoe'er he be,
And with mine own hand give his diamond to him, 755
Lest I be found as faithless in the quest
As you proud Prince who left the quest to me.
Sweet father, I behold him in my dreams
Gaunt as it were the skeleton of himself,
Death-pale, for lack of gentle maiden's aid. 760
The gentler-born the maiden, the more bound,
My father, to be sweet and serviceable
To noble knights in sickness, as ye know
When these have worn their tokens : let me hence
I pray you.' Then her father nodding said, 765
'Ay, ay, the diamond: wit ye well, my child,
Right fain were I to learn this knight were whole,
Being our greatest: yea, and you must give it —
And sure I think this fruit is hung too high
For any mouth to gape for save a queen's — 770
Nay, I mean nothing: so then, get you gone,
Being so very wilful you must go.'

Lightly, her suit allow'd, she slipp'd away,
And while she made her ready for her ride,
Her father's latest word humm'd in her ear, 775
'Being so very wilful you must go.'
And changed itself and echo'd in her heart,
'Being so very wilful you must die.'
But she was happy enough and shook it off,
As we shake off the bee that buzzes at us; 780
And in her heart she answer'd it and said,
'What matter, so I help him back to life?'
Then far away with good Sir Torre for guide
Rode o'er the long backs of the bushless downs
To Camelot, and before the city-gates 785

Came on her brother with a happy face
Making a roan horse caper and curvet
For pleasure all about a field of flowers :
Whom when she saw, 'Lavaine,' she cried, 'Lavaine,
How fares my lord Sir Lancelot ?' He amazed, 790
'Torre and Elaine ! why here ? Sir Lancelot !
How know ye my lord's name is Lancelot ?'
But when the maid had told him all her tale,
Then turn'd Sir Torre, and being in his moods
Left them, and under the strange-statued gate, 795
Where Arthur's wars were render'd mystically,
Pass'd up the still rich city to his kin,
His own far blood, which dwelt at Camelot ;
And her, Lavaine across the poplar grove
Led to the caves : there first she saw the casque 800
Of Lancelot on the wall : her scarlet sleeve,
Tho' carved and cut, and half the pearls away,
Stream'd from it still ; and in her heart she laugh'd,
Because he had not loosed it from his helm,
But meant once more perchance to tourney in it. 805
And when they gain'd the cell wherein he slept,
His battle-writhen arms and mighty hands
Lay naked on the wolfskin, and a dream
Of dragging down his enemy made them move.
Then she that saw him lying unsleek, unshorn, 810
Gaunt as it were the skeleton of himself,
Utter'd a little tender dolorous cry.
The sound not wonted in a place so still
Woke the sick knight, and while he roll'd his eyes
Yet blank from sleep, she started to him, saying, 815
'Your prize the diamond sent you by the King :'
His eyes glisten'd : she fancied 'Is it for me ?'
And when the maid had told him all the tale

Of King and Prince, the diamond sent, the quest
 Assign'd to her not worthy of it, she knelt 820
 Full lowly by the corners of his bed,
 And laid the diamond in his open hand.
 Her face was near, and as we kiss the child
 That does the task assign'd, he kiss'd her face;
 At once she slipp'd like water to the floor. 825
 'Alas,' he said, 'your ride hath wearied you.
 Rest must you have.' 'No rest for me,' she said;
 'Nay, for near you, fair lord, I am at rest.'
 What might she mean by that? his large black eyes,
 Yet larger thro' his leanness, dwelt upon her, 830
 Till all her heart's sad secret blazed itself
 In the heart's colors on her simple face;
 And Lancelot look'd and was perplex'd in mind,
 And being weak in body said no more;
 But did not love the color; woman's love, 835
 Save one, he not regarded, and so turn'd
 Sighing, and feign'd a sleep until he slept.

Then rose Elaine and glided thro' the fields,
 And pass'd beneath the weirdly-sculptured gates
 Far up the dim rich city to her kin; 840
 There bode the night: but woke with dawn, and pass'd
 Down thro' the dim rich city to the fields,
 Thence to the cave: so day by day she pass'd
 In either twilight ghost-like to and fro
 Gliding, and every day she tended him, 845
 And likewise many a night: and Lancelot
 Would, tho' he call'd his wound a little hurt
 Whereof he should be quickly whole, at times
 Brain-feverous in his heat and agony, seem
 Uncourteous, even he: but the meek maid 850

Sweetly forbore him ever, being to him
Meeker than any child to a rough nurse,
Milder than any mother to a sick child,
And never woman yet, since man's first fall,
Did kindlier unto man, but her deep love 855
Upbore her; till the hermit, skill'd in all
The simples and the science of that time,
Told him that her fine care had saved his life.
And the sick man forgot her simple blush,
Would call her friend and sister, sweet Elaine, 860
Would listen for her coming and regret
Her parting step, and held her tenderly,
And loved her with all love except the love
Of man and woman when they love their best,
Closest and sweetest, and had died the death 865
In any knightly fashion for her sake.
And peradventure had he seen her first
She might have made this and that other world
Another world for the sick man; but now
The shackles of an old love straiten'd him, 870
His honor rooted in dishonor stood,
And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true.

Yet the great knight in his mid-sickness made
Full many a holy vow and pure resolve.
These, as but born of sickness, could not live : 875
For when the blood ran lustier in him again,
Full often the bright image of one face,
Making a treacherous quiet in his heart,
Dispersed his resolution like a cloud.
Then if the maiden, while that ghostly grace 880
Beam'd on his fancy, spoke, he answer'd not,
Or short and coldly, and she knew right well

What the rough sickness meant, but what this meant
She knew not, and the sorrow dimm'd her sight,
And drave her ere her time across the fields 885
Far into the rich city, where alone
She murmur'd, 'Vain, in vain: it cannot be.
He will not love me: how then? must I die?'
Then as a little helpless innocent bird,
That has but one plain passage of few notes, 890
Will sing the simple passage o'er and o'er
For all an April morning till the ear
Wearies to hear it, so the simple maid
Went half the night repeating, 'Must I die?'
And now to right she turn'd, and now to left, 895
And found no ease in turning or in rest;
And 'Him or death,' she mutter'd, 'death or him,'
Again and like a burthen, 'Him or death.'

But when Sir Lancelot's deadly hurt was whole,
To Astolat returning rode the three. 900
There morn by morn, arraying her sweet self
In that wherein she deem'd she look'd her best,
She came before Sir Lancelot, for she thought
'If I be loved, these are my festal robes,
If not, the victim's flowers before he fall.' 905
And Lancelot ever press'd upon the maid
That she should ask some goodly gift of him
For her own self or hers: 'and do not shun
To speak the wish most near to your true heart;
Such service have ye done me, that I make 910
My will of yours, and Prince and Lord am I
In mine own land, and what I will I can.'
Then like a ghost she lifted up her face,
But like a ghost without the power to speak.

And Lancelot saw that she withheld her wish. 915
And bode among them yet a little space
Till he should learn it; and one morn it chanced
He found her in among the garden yews,
And said, 'Delay no longer, speak your wish,
Seeing I go to-day:' then out she brake: 920
'Going? and we shall never see you more.
And I must die for want of one bold word.'
'Speak: that I live to hear,' he said, 'is yours.'
Then suddenly and passionately she spoke:
'I have gone mad. I love you: let me die.' 925
'Ah, sister,' answer'd Lancelot, 'what is this?'
And innocently extending her white arms,
'Your love,' she said, 'your love — to be your wife.'
And Lancelot answered, 'Had I chosen to wed,
I had been wedded earlier, sweet Elaine: 930
But now there never will be wife of mine.'
'No, no,' she cried, 'I care not to be wife,
But to be with you still, to see your face,
To serve you, and to follow you thro' the world.'
And Lancelot answer'd, 'Nay, the world, the world, 935
All ear and eye, with such a stupid heart
To interpret ear and eye, and such a tongue
To blare its own interpretation — nay,
Full ill then should I quit your brother's love,
And your good father's kindness.' And she said, 940
'Not to be with you, not to see your face —
Alas for me then, my good days are done.'
'Nay, noble maid,' he answer'd, 'ten times nay!
This is not love: but love's first flash in youth,
Most common: yea, I know it of mine own self: 945
And you yourself will smile at your own self
Hereafter, when you yield your flower of life

To one more fitly yours, not thrice your age :
 And then will I, for true you are and sweet
 Beyond mine old belief in womanhood, 950
 More specially should your good knight be poor,
 Endow you with broad land and territory
 Even to the half my realm beyond the seas,
 So that would make you happy : furthermore,
 Even to the death, as tho' ye were my blood, 955
 In all your quarrels will I be your knight.
 This will I do, dear damsel, for your sake,
 And more than this I cannot.'

While he spoke
 She neither blush'd nor shook, but deathly-pale
 Stood grasping what was nearest, then replied : 960
 'Of all this will I nothing;' and so fell,
 And thus they bore her swooning to her tower.

Then spake, to whom thro' those black walls of yew
 Their talk had pierced, her father : 'Ay, a flash,
 I fear me, that will strike my blossom dead. 965
 Too courteous are ye, fair Lord Lancelot.
 I pray you, use some rough discourtesy
 To blunt or break her passion.'

Lancelot said,
 'That were against me : what I can I will ;'
 And there that day remain'd, and toward even 970
 Sent for his shield : full meekly rose the maid,
 Stripp'd off the case, and gave the naked shield ;
 Then, when she heard his horse upon the stones,
 Unclasping flung the casement back, and look'd
 Down on his helm, from which her sleeve had gone. 975
 And Lancelot knew the little clinking sound ;

And she by tact of love was well aware
Then Lancelot knew that she was looking at him.
And yet he glanced not up, nor waved his hand,
Nor bade farewell, but sadly rode away. 980
This was the one discourtesy that he used.

So in her tower alone the maiden sat :
His very shield was gone ; only the case,
Her own poor work, her empty labor, left.
But still she heard him, still his picture form'd 985
And grew between her and the pictured wall.
Then came her father, saying in low tones,
' Have comfort,' whom she greeted quietly.
Then came her brethren saying, ' Peace to thee,
Sweet sister,' whom she answer'd with all calm. 990
But when they left her to herself again,
Death, like a friend's voice from a distant field
Approaching thro' the darkness, call'd : the owls
Wailing had power upon her, and she mix'd
Her fancies with the sallow-rifted glooms 995
Of evening and the moanings of the wind.

And in those days she made a little song,
And call'd her song ' The Song of Love and Death,'
And sang it : sweetly could she make and sing.

' Sweet is true love tho' given in vain, in vain ; 1000
And sweet is death who puts an end to pain :
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

' Love, art thou sweet ? then bitter death must be :
Love, thou art bitter ; sweet is death to me.
O Love, if death be sweeter, let me die. 1005

‘Sweet love, that seems not made to fade away,
Sweet death, that seems to make us loveless clay,
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

‘I fain would follow love, if that could be;
I needs must follow death, who calls for me; 1010
Call and I follow, I follow! let me die.’

High with the last line scaled her voice, and this,
All in a fiery dawning wild with wind
That shook her tower, the brothers heard, and thought
With shuddering, ‘Hark the Phantom of the house 1015
That ever shrieks before a death,’ and call’d
The father, and all three in hurry and fear
Ran to her, and lo! the blood-red light of dawn
Flared on her face, she shrilling, ‘Let me die!’

As when we dwell upon a word we know, 1020
Repeating, till the word we know so well
Becomes a wonder, and we know not why,
So dwelt the father on her face, and thought
‘Is this Elaine?’ till back the maiden fell,
Then gave a languid hand to each, and lay, 1025
Speaking a still good-morrow with her eyes.
At last she said, ‘Sweet brothers, yesternight
I seem’d a curious little maid again,
As happy as when we dwelt among the woods,
And when ye used to take me with the flood 1030
Up the great river in the boatman’s boat.
Only ye would not pass beyond the cape
That has the poplar on it: there ye fix’d
Your limit, oft returning with the tide.

And yet I cried because ye would not pass 1035
Beyond it, and far up the shining flood
Until we found the palace of the King.
And yet ye would not: but this night I dream'd
That I was all alone upon the flood,
And then I said, "Now shall I have my will:" 1040
And there I woke, but still the wish remain'd.
So let me hence, that I may pass at last
Beyond the poplar and far up the flood,
Until I find the palace of the King.
There will I enter in among them all, 1045
And no man there will dare to mock at me;
But there the fine Gawain will wonder at me,
And there the great Sir Lancelot muse at me;
Gawain, who had a thousand farewells to me,
Lancelot, who coldly went, nor bad me one; 1050
And there the King will know me and my love,
And there the Queen herself will pity me,
And all the gentle court will welcome me,
And after my long voyage I shall rest!'

'Peace,' said her father, 'O my child, ye seem 1055
Light-headed, for what force is yours to go
So far, being sick? and wherefore would ye look
On this proud fellow again, who scorns us all?'

Then the rough Torre began to heave and move
And bluster into stormy sobs and say, 1060
'I never loved him: an I meet with him,
I care not howsoever great he be,
Then will I strike at him and strike him down,
Give me good fortune, I will strike him dead,
For this discomfort he hath done the house.' 1065

To whom the gentle sister made reply,
 'Fret not yourself, dear brother, nor be wroth,
 Seeing it is no more Sir Lancelot's fault
 Not to love me, than it is mine to love
 Him of all men who seems to me the highest.' 1070

'Highest?' the father answer'd, echoing 'highest?'
 (He meant to break the passion in her) 'nay,
 Daughter, I know not what you call the highest;
 But this I know, for all the people know it,
 He loves the Queen, and in an open shame: 1075
 And she returns his love in open shame;
 If this be high, what is it to be low?'

Then spake the lily maid of Astolat:
 'Sweet father, all too faint and sick am I
 For anger: these are slanders: never yet 1080
 Was noble man but made ignoble talk.
 He makes no friend who never made a foe.
 But now it is my glory to have loved
 One peerless, without stain; so let me pass,
 My father, howsoe'er I seem to you, 1085
 Not all unhappy, having loved God's best
 And greatest, tho' my love had no return:
 Yet, seeing you desire your child to live,
 Thanks, but you work against your own desire;
 For if I could believe the things you say 1090
 I should but die the sooner; wherefore cease,
 Sweet father, and bid call the ghostly man
 Hither, and let me shrive me clean, and die.'

So when the ghostly man had come and gone,
 She, with a face bright as for sin forgiven, 1095

Besought Lavaine to write as she devised
A letter, word for word; and when he ask'd
'Is it for Lancelot, is it for my dear lord?
Then will I bear it gladly;' she replied,
'For Lancelot and the Queen and all the world, 1100
But I myself must bear it.' Then he wrote
The letter she devised; which being writ
And folded, 'O sweet father, tender and true,
Deny me not,' she said — 'ye never yet
Denied my fancies — this, however strange, 1105
My latest: lay the letter in my hand
A little ere I die, and close the hand
Upon it; I shall guard it even in death.
And when the heat is gone from out my heart,
Then take the little bed on which I died 1110
For Lancelot's love, and deck it like the Queen's
For richness, and me also like the Queen
In all I have of rich, and lay me on it.
And let there be prepared a chariot-bier
To take me to the river, and a barge 1115
Be ready on the river, clothed in black.
I go in state to court to meet the Queen.
There surely I shall speak for mine own self,
And none of you can speak for me so well.
And therefore let our dumb old man alone 1120
Go with me, he can steer and row, and he
Will guide me to that palace, to the doors.'

She ceased: her father promised; whereupon
She grew so cheerful that they deem'd her death
Was rather in the fantasy than the blood. 1125
But ten slow mornings pass'd, and on the eleventh
Her father laid the letter in her hand,

And closed the hand upon it, and she died.
So that day there was dole in Astolat.

But when the next sun brake from underground, 1130
Then, those two brethren slowly with bent brows
Accompanying, the sad chariot-bier
Pass'd like a shadow thro' the field, that shone
Full-summer, to that stream whereon the barge,
Pall'd all its length in blackest samite, lay. 1135
There sat the lifelong creature of the house,
Loyal, the dumb old servitor, on deck,
Winking his eyes, and twisted all his face.
So those two brethren from the chariot took
And on the black decks laid her in her bed, 1140
Set in her hand a lily, o'er her hung
The silken case with braided blazonings,
And kiss'd her quiet brows, and saying to her
'Sister, farewell for ever,' and again
'Farewell, sweet sister,' parted all in tears. ✓ 1145
Then rose the dumb old servitor, and the dead,
Oar'd by the dumb, went upward with the flood —
In her right hand the lily, in her left
The letter — all her bright hair streaming down —
And all the coverlid was cloth of gold 1150
Drawn to her waist, and she herself in white
All but her face, and that clear-featured face
Was lovely, for she did not seem as dead,
But fast asleep, and lay as tho' she smiled.

That day Sir Lancelot at the palace craved 1155
Audience of Guinevere, to give at last
The price of half a realm, his costly gift,

Hard-won and hardly won with bruise and blow,
With deaths of others, and almost his own,
The nine-years-fought-for diamonds: for he saw 1160
One of her house, and sent him to the Queen
Bearing his wish, whereto the Queen agreed
With such and so unmoved a majesty
She might have seem'd her statue, but that he,
Low-drooping till he wellnigh kiss'd her feet 1165
For loyal awe, saw with a sidelong eye
The shadow of some piece of pointed lace,
In the Queen's shadow, vibrate on the walls,
And parted, laughing in his courtly heart.

All in an oriel on the summer side, 1170
Vine-clad, of Arthur's palace toward the stream,
They met, and Lancelot kneeling utter'd, 'Queen,
Lady, my liege, in whom I have my joy,
Take, what I had not won except for you,
These jewels, and make me happy, making them 1175
An armlet for the roundest arm on earth,
Or necklace for a neck to which the swan's
Is tawnier than her cygnet's: these are words:
Your beauty is your beauty, and I sin
In speaking, yet O grant my worship of it 1180
Words, as we grant grief tears. Such sin in words,
Perchance, we both can pardon: but, my Queen,
I hear of rumors flying thro' your court.
Our bond, as not the bond of man and wife,
Should have in it an absoluter trust 1185
To make up that defect: let rumors be:
When did not rumors fly? these, as I trust
That you trust me in your own nobleness,
I may not well believe that you believe.'

While thus he spoke, half turn'd away, the Queen 1190
 Brake from the vast oriel-embowering vine
 Leaf after leaf, and tore, and cast them off,
 Till all the place whereon she stood was green;
 Then, when he ceased, in one cold passive hand
 Received at once and laid aside the gems 1195
 There on a table near her, and replied :

‘It may be, I am quicker of belief
 Than you believe me, Lancelot of the Lake.
 Our bond is not the bond of man and wife.
 This good is in it, whatsoe’er of ill, 1200
 It can be broken easier. I for you
 This many a year have done despite and wrong
 To one whom ever in my heart of hearts
 I did acknowledge nobler. What are these?
 Diamonds for me! they had been thrice their worth 1205
 Being your gift, had you not lost your own.
 To loyal hearts the value of all gifts
 Must vary as the giver’s. Not for me!
 For her! for your new fancy. Only this
 Grant me, I pray you: have your joys apart. 1210
 I doubt not that however changed, you keep
 So much of what is graceful: and myself
 Would shun to break those bounds of courtesy
 In which as Arthur’s Queen I move and rule:
 So cannot speak my mind. An end to this: 1215
 A strange one! yet I take it with Amen.
 So pray you, add my diamonds to her pearls;
 Deck her with these; tell her, she shines me down:
 An armlet for an arm to which the Queen’s
 Is haggard, or a necklace for a neck 1220
 O as much fairer — as a faith once fair

Was richer than these diamonds — hers, not mine —
 Nay, by the mother of our Lord himself,
 Or hers or mine, mine now to work my will —
 She shall not have them.'

Saying which she seized, 1225

And, thro' the casement standing wide for heat,
 Flung them, and down they flash'd, and smote the stream.
 Then from the smitten surface flash'd, as it were,
 Diamonds to meet them, and they pass'd away.
 Then while Sir Lancelot leant, in half disdain 1230
 At love, life, all things, on the window ledge,
 Close underneath his eyes, and right across
 Where these had fallen, slowly pass'd the barge
 Whereon the lily maid of Astolat
 Lay smiling, like a star in blackest night. 1235

But the wild Queen, who saw not, burst away
 To weep and wail in secret; and the barge,
 On to the palace-doorway sliding, paused.
 There two stood arm'd, and kept the door; to whom,
 All up the marble stair, tier over tier, 1240
 Were added mouths that gaped, and eyes that ask'd
 'What is it?' but that oarsman's haggard face,
 As hard and still as is the face that men
 Shape to their fancy's eye from broken rocks
 On some cliff-side, appall'd them, and they said, 1245
 'He is enchanted, cannot speak — and she,
 Look how she sleeps — the Fairy Queen, so fair!
 Yea, but how pale! what are they? flesh and blood?
 Or come to take the King to Fairyland?
 For some do hold our Arthur cannot die, 1250
 But that he passes into Fairyland.'

While thus they babbled of the King, the King
 Came girt with knights: then turn'd the tongueless man
 From the half-face to the full eye, and rose
 And pointed to the damsel, and the doors. 1255
 So Arthur bade the meek Sir Percivale
 And pure Sir Galahad to uplift the maid;
 And reverently they bore her into hall.
 Then came the fine Gawain and wonder'd at her,
 And Lancelot later came and mused at her, 1260
 And last the Queen herself, and pitied her:
 But Arthur spied the letter in her hand,
 Stoop'd, took, brake seal, and read it; this was all:

‘Most noble lord, Sir Lancelot of the Lake,
 I, sometime call'd the maid of Astolat, 1265
 Come, for you left me taking no farewell,
 Hither, to take my last farewell of you.
 I loved you, and my love had no return,
 And therefore my true love has been my death.
 And therefore to our Lady Guinevere, 1270
 And to all other ladies, I make moan.
 Pray for my soul, and yield me burial.
 Pray for my soul thou too, Sir Lancelot,
 As thou art a knight peerless.’

Thus he read;
 And ever in the reading, lords and dames 1275
 Wept, looking often from his face who read
 To hers which lay so silent, and at times,
 So touch'd were they, half-thinking that her lips,
 Who had devised the letter, moved again.

Then freely spoke Sir Lancelot to them all: 1280
 ‘My lord liege Arthur, and all ye that hear,

Know that for this most gentle maiden's death
Right heavy am I ; for good she was and true,
But loved me with a love beyond all love
In women, whomsoever I have known. 1285
Yet to be loved makes not to love again ;
Not at my years, however it hold in youth.
I swear by truth and knighthood that I gave
No cause, not willingly, for such a love :
To this I call my friends in testimony, 1290
Her brethren, and her father who himself
Besought me to be plain and blunt, and use,
To break her passion, some discourtesy
Against my nature ; what I could, I did.
I left her and I bade her no farewell ; 1295
Tho' had I dreamt the damsel would have died,
I might have put my wits to some rough use,
And help'd her from herself.'

Then said the Queen
(Sea was her wrath, yet working after storm),
'Ye might at least have done her so much grace, 1300
Fair lord, as would have help'd her from her death.'
He raised his head, their eyes met and hers fell,
He adding,

'Queen, she would not be content
Save that I wedded her, which could not be.
Then might she follow me thro' the world, she ask'd ; 1305
It could not be. I told her that her love
Was but the flash of youth, would darken down
To rise hereafter in a stiller flame
Toward one more worthy of her — then would I,
More specially were he she wedded poor, 1310
Estate them with large land and territory

In mine own realm beyond the narrow seas,
To keep them in all joyance: more than this
I could not; this she would not, and she died.'

He pausing, Arthur answer'd, 'O my knight, 1315
It will be to thy worship, as my knight,
And mine, as head of all our Table Round,
To see that she be buried worshipfully.'

So toward that shrine which then in all the realm
Was richest, Arthur leading, slowly went 1320
The marshall'd Order of their Table Round,
And Lancelot sad beyond his wont, to see
The maiden buried, not as one unknown,
Nor meanly, but with gorgeous obsequies,
And mass, and rolling music, like a queen. 1325
And when the knights had laid her comely head
Low in the dust of half-forgotten kings,
Then Arthur spake among them, 'Let her tomb
Be costly, and her image thereupon,
And let the shield of Lancelot at her feet 1330
Be carven, and her lily in her hand.
And let the story of her dolorous voyage
For all true hearts be blazon'd on her tomb
In letters gold and azure!' which was wrought
Thereafter; but when now the lords and dames 1335
And people, from the high door streaming, brake
Disorderly, as homeward each, the Queen,
Who mark'd Sir Lancelot where he moved apart,
Drew near, and sigh'd in passing, 'Lancelot,
Forgive me; mine was jealousy in love.' 1340
He answer'd with his eyes upon the ground,
'That is love's curse; pass on, my Queen, forgiven.'

But Arthur, who beheld his cloudy brows,
Approach'd him, and with full affection said,

‘Lancelot, my Lancelot, thou in whom I have 1345
Most joy and most affiance, for I know
What thou hast been in battle by my side,
And many a time have watch'd thee at the tilt
Strike down the lusty and long practised knight,
And let the younger and unskill'd go by 1350
To win his honor and to make his name,
And loved thy courtesies and thee, a man
Made to be loved; but now I would to God,
Seeing the homeless trouble in thine eyes,
Thou couldst have loved this maiden, shaped, it seems, 1355
By God for thee alone, and from her face,
If one may judge the living by the dead,
Delicately pure and marvellously fair,
Who might have brought thee, now a lonely man
Wifeless and heirless, noble issue, sons 1360
Born to the glory of thy name and fame,
My knight, the great Sir Lancelot of the Lake.’

Then answer'd Lancelot, ‘Fair she was, my King,
Pure, as you ever wish your knights to be.
To doubt her fairness were to want an eye, 1365
To doubt her pureness were to want a heart —
Yea, to be loved, if what is worthy love
Could bind him, but free love will not be bound.’

‘Free love, so bound, were freest,’ said the King.
‘Let love be free; free love is for the best: 1370
And, after heaven, on our dull side of death,
What should be best, if not so pure a love

Clothed in so pure a loveliness? yet thee
 She failed to bind, tho' being, as I think,
 Unbound as yet, and gentle, as I know.' 1375

And Lancelot answer'd nothing, but he went,
 And at the inrunning of a little brook
 Sat by the river in a cove, and watch'd
 The high reed wave, and lifted up his eyes
 And saw the barge that brought her moving down, 1380
 Far-off, a blot upon the stream, and said
 Low in himself, 'Ah, simple heart and sweet,
 Ye loved me, damsel, surely with a love
 Far tenderer than my Queen's. Pray for thy soul?
 Ay, that will I. Farewell too — now at last — 1385
 Farewell, fair lily.' "Jealousy in love?"
 Not rather dead love's harsh heir, jealous pride?
 Queen, if I grant the jealousy as of love,
 May not your crescent fear for name and fame
 Speak, as it waxes, of a love that wanes? 1390
 Why did the King dwell on my name to me?
 Mine own name shames me, seeming a reproach,
 Lancelot, whom the Lady of the Lake
 Caught from his mother's arms — the wondrous one
 Who passes thro' the vision of the night — 1395
 She chanted snatches of mysterious hymns
 Heard on the winding waters, eve and morn
 She kiss'd me saying, "Thou art fair, my child,
 As a king's son," and often in her arms
 She bare me, pacing on the dusky mere. 1400
 Would she had drown'd me in it, where'er it be!
 For what am I? what profits me my name
 Of greatest knight? I fought for it, and have it:
 Pleasure to have it, none; to lose it, pain;

Now grown a part of me: but what use in it? 1405
To make man worse by making my sin known?
Or sin seem less, the sinner seeming great?
Alas for Arthur's greatest knight, a man
Not after Arthur's heart! I needs must break
These bonds that so defame me: not without 1410
She wills it: would I, if she will'd it? nay,
Who knows? but if I would not, then may God,
I pray him, send a sudden Angel down
To seize me by the hair and bear me far,
And fling me deep in that forgotten mere, 1415
Among the tumbled fragments of the hills.'

So groan'd Sir Lancelot in remorseful pain,
Not knowing he should die a holy man.

THE PASSING OF ARTHUR.

THAT story which the bold Sir Bedivere,
First made and latest left of all the knights,
Told, when the man was no more than a voice
In the white winter of his age, to those
With whom he dwelt, new faces, other minds.

5

For on their march to westward, Bedivere,
Who slowly paced among the slumbering host,
Heard in his tent the moanings of the King:

‘I found Him in the shining of the stars,
I mark’d Him in the flowering of His fields,
But in His ways with men I find Him not.
I waged His wars, and now I pass and die.

10

O me! for why is all around us here
As if some lesser god had made the world,
But had not force to shape it as he would,
Till the High God behold it from beyond,
And enter it, and make it beautiful?

15

Or else as if the world were wholly fair,
But that these eyes of men are dense and dim,
And have not power to see it as it is:

20

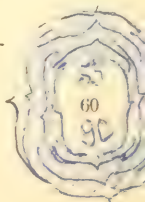
Perchance, because we see not to the close; —
For I, being simple, thought to work His will,
And have but stricken with the sword in vain;
And all whereon I lean’d in wife and friend
Is traitor to my peace, and all my realm
Reels back into the beast, and is no more.

25

My God, thou hast forgotten me in my death:
Nay — God my Christ — I pass but shall not die.’

Then, ere that last weird battle in the west,
 There came on Arthur sleeping, Gawain kill'd 30
 In Lancelot's war, the Ghost of Gawain blown
 Along a wandering wind, and past his ear
 Went shrilling, 'Hollow, hollow all delight!
 Hail, King! to-morrow thou shalt pass away.
 Farewell! there is an isle of rest for thee. 35
 And I am blown along a wandering wind,
 And hollow, hollow, hollow all delight.'
 And fainter onward, like wild birds that change
 Their season in the night and wail their way
 From cloud to cloud, down the long wind the dream 40
 Shrill'd; but in going mingled with dim cries
 Far in the moonlit haze among the hills,
 As of some lonely city sack'd by night,
 When all is lost, and wife and child with wail
 Pass to new lords; and Arthur woke and call'd, 45
 'Who spake? A dream. O light upon the wind,
 Thine, Gawain, was the voice — are these dim cries
 Thine? or doth all that haunts the waste and wild
 Mourn, knowing it will go along with me?'

This heard the bold Sir Bedivere and spake: 50
 'O me, my King, let pass whatever will,
 Elves, and the harmless glamour of the field;
 But in their stead thy name and glory cling
 To all high places like a golden cloud
 For ever: but as yet thou shalt not pass. 55
 Light was Gawain in life, and light in death
 Is Gawain, for the ghost is as the man;
 And care not thou for dreams from him, but rise —
 I hear the steps of Modred in the west,
 And with him many of thy people, and knights



Once thine, whom thou hast loved, but grosser grown
Than heathen, spitting at their vows and thee.
Right well in heart they know thee for the King.
Arise, go forth and conquer as of old.'

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere: 65
'Far other is this battle in the west
Whereto we move, than when we strove in youth,
And brake the petty kings, and fought with Rome,
Or thrust the heathen from the Roman wall,
And shook him thro' the north. Ill doom is mine 70
To war against my people and my knights.
The king who fights his people fights himself.
And they my knights, who loved me once, the stroke
That strikes them dead is as my death to me.
Yet let us hence, and find or feel a way 75
Thro' this blind haze, which ever since I saw
One lying in the dust at Almesbury,
Hath folded in the passes of the world.'

Then rose the King and moved his host by night,
And ever push'd Sir Modred, league by league, 80
Back to the sunset bound of Lyonesse —
A land of old upheaven from the abyss
By fire, to sink into the abyss again;
Where fragments of forgotten peoples dwelt,
And the long mountains ended in a coast 85
Of ever-shifting sand, and far away
The phantom circle of a moaning sea.
There the pursuer could pursue no more,
And he that fled no further fly the King;
There, that day when the great light of heaven 90
Burn'd at his lowest in the rolling year,

On the waste sand by the waste sea they closed.
 Nor ever yet had Arthur fought a fight
 Like this last, dim, weird battle of the west.
 A deathwhite mist slept over sand and sea: 95
 Whereof the chill, to him who breathed it, drew
 Down with his blood, till all his heart was cold
 With formless fear: and ev'n on Arthur fell
 Confusion, since he saw not whom he fought.
 For friend and foe were shadows in the mist, 100
 And friend slew friend not knowing whom he slew;
 And some had visions out of golden youth,
 And some beheld the faces of old ghosts
 Look in upon the battle; and in the mist
 Was many a noble deed, many a base, 105
 And chance and craft and strength in single fights,
 And ever and anon with host to host
 Shocks, and the splintering spear, the hard mail hewn,
 Shield-breakings, and the clash of brands, the crash
 Of battleaxes on shatter'd helms, and shrieks 110
 After the Christ, of those who falling down
 Look'd up for heaven, and only saw the mist;
 And shouts of heathen and the traitor knights,
 Oaths, insult, filth, and monstrous blasphemies,
 Sweat, writhing, anguish, laboring of the lungs 115
 In that close mist, and cryings for the light,
 Moans of the dying, and voices of the dead.

Last, as by some one deathbed after wail
 Of suffering, silence follows, or thro' death
 Or deathlike swoon, thus over all that shore, 120
 Save for some whisper of the seething seas,
 A dead hush fell; but when the dolorous day
 Grew drearier toward twilight falling, came

A bitter wind, clear from the North, and blew
The mist aside, and with that wind the tide 125
Rose, and the pale King glanced across the field
Of battle : but no man was moving there ;
Nor any cry of Christian heard thereon,
Nor yet of heathen ; only the wan wave
Brake in among dead faces, to and fro 130
Swaying the helpless hands, and up and down
Tumbling the hollow helmets of the fallen,
And shiver'd brands that once had fought with Rome,
And rolling far along the gloomy shores
The voice of days of old and days to be. 135

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere,
And whiter than the mist that all day long
Had held the field of battle was the King :

‘ Hearest thou this great voice that shakes the world,
And wastes the narrow realm whereon we move, 140
And beats upon the faces of the dead,
My dead, as tho’ they had not died for me ? —
O Bedivere, for on my heart hath fall’n
Confusion, till I know not what I am,
Nor whence I am, nor whether I be King. 145
Behold, I seem but King among the dead.’

Then spake the bold Sir Bedivere : ‘ My King,
King everywhere ! and so the dead have kings,
There also will I worship thee as King.
Yet still thy life is whole, and still I live 150
Who love thee ; but who hates thee, he that brought
The heathen back among us, yonder stands,
Modred, unharm’d, the traitor of thine house.’

Then spake the King: 'My house hath been my doom.
But call not thou this traitor of my house 155
Who hath but dwelt beneath one roof with me.
My house are rather they who sware my vows,
Yea, even while they brake them, own'd me King.
And well for thee, saying in my dark hour,
When all the purport of my throne hath fail'd, 160
That quick or dead thou holdest me for King.
King am I, whatsoever be their cry;
And one last act of kinghood shalt thou see
Yet, ere I pass.' And uttering this the King
Made at the man: then Modred smote his liege 165
Hard on that helm which many a heathen sword
Had beaten thin; while Arthur at one blow,
Striking the last stroke with Excalibur,
Slew him, and all but slain himself, he fell.

So all day long the noise of battle roll'd 170
Among the mountains by the winter sea;
Until King Arthur's Table, man by man,
Had fall'n in Lyonesse about their lord,
King Arthur. Then, because his wound was deep,
The bold Sir Bedivere uplifted him, 175
And bore him to a chapel nigh the field,
A broken chancel with a broken cross,
That stood on a dark strait of barren land;
On one side lay the Ocean, and on one
Lay a great water, and the moon was full. 180

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:
'The sequel of to-day unsolders all
The goodliest fellowship of famous knights
Whereof this world holds record. Such a sleep

They sleep — the men I loved. I think that we 185
Shall never more, at any future time,
Delight our souls with talk of knightly deeds,
Walking about the gardens and the halls
Of Camelot, as in the days that were.
I perish by this people which I made, — 190
Tho' Merlin sware that I should come again
To rule once more; but, let what will be, be,
I am so deeply smitten thro' the helm
That without help I cannot last till morn.
Thou therefore take my brand Excalibur, 195
Which was my pride: for thou rememberest how
In those old days, one summer noon, an arm
Rose up from out the bosom of the lake,
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
Holding the sword — and how I row'd across 200
And took it, and have worn it, like a king;
And, wheresoever I am sung or told
In aftertime, this also shall be known:
But now delay not: take Excalibur,
And fling him far into the middle mere: 205
Watch what thou seest, and lightly bring me word.'

To him replied the bold Sir Bedivere:
'It is not meet, Sir King, to leave thee thus,
Aidless, alone, and smitten thro' the helm —
A little thing may harm a wounded man; 210
Yet I thy hest will all perform at full,
Watch what I see, and lightly bring thee word.'

So saying, from the ruin'd shrine he stepp'd,
And in the moon athwart the place of tombs,
Where lay the mighty bones of ancient men, 215

Old knights, and over them the sea-wind sang
Shrill, chilly with flakes of foam. He, stepping down
By zigzag paths, and juts of pointed rock,
Came on the shining levels of the lake.

There drew he forth the brand Excalibur, 220
And o'er him, drawing it, the winter moon,
Brightening the skirts of a long cloud, ran forth
And sparkled keen with frost against the hilt :
For all the haft twinkled with diamond sparks,
Myriads of topaz-lights, and jacinth-work 225
Of subtlest jewellery. He gazed so long
That both his eyes were dazzled as he stood,
This way and that dividing the swift mind,
In act to throw : but at the last it seem'd
Better to leave Excalibur conceal'd 230
There in the many-knotted waterflags,
That whistled stiff and dry about the marge.
So strode he back slow to the wounded King.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere :
' Hast thou perform'd my mission which I gave ? 235
What is it thou hast seen ? or what hast heard ? '

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere :
' I heard the ripple washing in the reeds,
And the wild water lapping on the crag.'

To whom replied King Arthur, faint and pale : 240
' Thou hast betray'd thy nature and thy name,
Not rendering true answer, as beseem'd
Thy fealty, nor like a noble knight :
For surer sign had follow'd, either hand,

Or voice, or else a motion of the mere. 245
This is a shameful thing for men to lie.
Yet now, I charge thee, quickly go again,
As thou art lief and dear, and do the thing
I bade thee, watch, and lightly bring me word.'

Then went Sir Bedivere the second time 250
Across the ridge, and paced beside the mere,
Counting the dewy pebbles, fix'd in thought;
But when he saw the wonder of the hilt,
How curiously and strangely chased, he smote
His palms together, and he cried aloud: 255

'And if indeed I cast the brand away,
Surely a precious thing, one worthy note,
Should thus be lost for ever from the earth,
Which might have pleased the eyes of many men.
What good should follow this, if this were done? 260
What harm, undone? Deep harm to disobey,
Seeing obedience is the bond of rule.
Were it well to obey then, if a king demand
An act unprofitable, against himself?
The King is sick, and knows not what he does. 265
What record, or what relic of my lord
Should be to aftertime, but empty breath
And rumors of a doubt? But were this kept,
Stored in some treasure-house of mighty kings,
Some one might show it at a joust of arms, 270
Saying, "King Arthur's sword, Excalibur,
Wrought by the lonely maiden of the Lake.
Nine years she wrought it, sitting in the deeps
Upon the hidden bases of the hills."
So might some old man speak in the aftertime 275

To all the people, winning reverence.
But now much honor and much fame were lost.'

So spake he, clouded with his own conceit,
And hid Excalibur the second time,
And so strode back slow to the wounded King. 280

Then spoke King Arthur, breathing heavily :
'What is it thou hast seen ? or what hast heard ?'

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere :
'I heard the water lapping on the crag,
And the long ripple washing in the reeds.' 285

To whom replied King Arthur, much in wrath :
'Ah, miserable and unkind, untrue,
Unknightly, traitor-hearted ! Woe is me !
Authority forgets a dying king,
Laid widow'd of the power in his eye 290
That bow'd the will. I see thee what thou art,
For thou, the latest-left of all my knights,
In whom should meet the offices of all,
Thou wouldst betray me for the precious hilt ;
Either from lust of gold, or like a girl 295
Valuing the giddy pleasure of the eyes.
Yet, for a man may fail in duty twice,
And the third time may prosper, get thee hence :
But, if thou spare to fling Excalibur,
I will arise and slay thee with my hands.' 300

Then quickly rose Sir Bedivere, and ran,
And, leaping down the ridges lightly, plunged
Among the bulrush beds, and clutch'd the sword,
And strongly wheel'd and threw it. The great brand

Made lightnings in the splendor of the moon, 305
And flashing round and round, and whirl'd in an arch,
Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,
Seen where the moving isles of winter shook
By night, with noises of the Northern Sea.
So flash'd and fell the brand Excalibur: 310
But ere he dipp'd the surface, rose an arm
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
And caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him
Three times, and drew him under in the mere.
And lightly went the other to the King. 315

Then spoke King Arthur, drawing thicker breath:
'Now see I by thine eyes that this is done.
Speak out: what is it thou hast heard, or seen?'

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
'Sir King, I closed mine eyelids, lest the gems 320
Should blind my purpose, for I never saw,
Nor shall see, here or elsewhere, till I die,
Not tho' I live three lives of mortal men,
So great a miracle as yonder hilt.
Then with both hands I flung him, wheeling him; 325
But when I look'd again, behold an arm,
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
That caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him
Three times, and drew him under in the mere.'

And answer made King Arthur, breathing hard: 330
'My end draws nigh; 'tis time that I were gone.
Make broad thy shoulders to receive my weight,
And bear me to the margin; yet I fear
My wound hath taken cold, and I shall die.'

So saying, from the pavement he half rose, 335
 Slowly, with pain, reclining on his arm,
 And looking wistfully with wide blue eyes
 As in a picture. Him Sir Bedivere
 Remorsefully regarded thro' his tears,
 And would have spoken, but he found not words; 340
 Then took with care, and kneeling on one knee,
 O'er both his shoulders drew the languid hands,
 And rising bore him thro' the place of tombs.

But, as he walk'd, King Arthur panted hard,
 Like one that feels a nightmare on his bed 345
 When all the house is mute. So sigh'd the King,
 Muttering and murmuring at his ear, 'Quick, quick!
 I fear it is too late, and I shall die.'
 But the other swiftly strode from ridge to ridge,
 Clothed with his breath, and looking, as he walk'd, 350
 Larger than human on the frozen hills.
 He heard the deep behind him, and a cry
 Before. His own thought drove him like a goad.
 Dry clash'd his harness in the icy caves
 And barren chasms, and all to left and right 355
 The bare black cliff clang'd round him, as he based
 His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang
 Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels —
 And on a sudden, lo! the level lake,
 And the long glories of the winter moon. 360

Then saw they how there hove a dusky barge,
 Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern,
 Beneath them: and descending they were ware
 That all the decks were dense with stately forms,
 Black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream — by these 365

Three Queens with crowns of gold : and from them rose
A cry that shiver'd to the tingling stars,
And, as it were one voice, an agony
Of lamentation, like a wind that shrills
All night in a waste land, where no one comes, 370
Or hath come, since the making of the world.

Then murmur'd Arthur, 'Place me in the barge.'
So to the barge they came. There those three Queens
Put forth their hands, and took the King, and wept.
But she, that rose the tallest of them all 375
And fairest, laid his head upon her lap,
And loosed the shatter'd casque, and chafed his hands,
And call'd him by his name, complaining loud,
And dropping bitter tears against a brow
Striped with dark blood : for all his face was white 380
And colorless, and like the wither'd moon
Smote by the fresh beam of the springing east ;
And all his greaves and cuisses dash'd with drops
Of onset ; and the light and lustrous curls —
That made his forehead like a rising sun 385
High from the dais-throne — were parch'd with dust ;
Or, clotted into points and hanging loose,
Mix'd with the knightly growth that fringed his lips.
So like a shatter'd column lay the King ;
Not like that Arthur who, with lance in rest, 390
From spur to plume a star of tournament,
Shot thro' the lists at Camelot, and charged
Before the eyes of ladies and of kings.

Then loudly cried the bold Sir Bedivere :
'Ah ! my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go ? 395
Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes ?

For now I see the true old times are dead,
 When every morning brought a noble chance,
 And every chance brought out a noble knight.
 Such times have been not since the light that led 400
 The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh.
 But now the whole Round Table is dissolved
 Which was an image of the mighty world,
 And I, the last, go forth companionless,
 And the days darken round me, and the years, } 405
 Among new men, strange faces, other minds.'

And slowly answer'd Arthur from the barge :
 'The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
 And God fulfils himself in many ways,
 Lest one good custom should corrupt the world. 410
 Comfort thyself: what comfort is in me?'
 I have lived my life, and that which I have done
 May He within himself make pure! but thou,
 If thou shouldst never see my face again,
 Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer
 Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice 416
 Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
 For what are men better than sheep or goats
 That nourish a blind life within the brain,
 If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer 420
 Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
 For so the whole round earth is every way
 Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.
 But now farewell. I am going a long way
 With these thou seest — if indeed I go 425
 (For all my mind is clouded with a doubt) —
 To the island-valley of Avilion;
 Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,

Nor ever wind blows loudly ; but it lies
Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard lawns 430
And bowery hollows crown'd with summer sea,
Where I will heal me of my grievous wound.'

So said he, and the barge with oar and sail
Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted swan
That, fluting a wild carol ere her death, 435
Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood
With swarthy webs. Long stood Sir Bedivere
Revolving many memories, till the hull
Look'd one black dot against the verge of dawn,
And on the mere the wailing died away. 440

But when that moan had past for evermore,
The stillness of the dead world's winter dawn
Amazed him, and he groaned, 'The King is gone.'
And therewithal came on him the weird rhyme,
'From the great deep to the great deep he goes.' 445

Whereat he slowly turn'd and slowly clomb
The last hard footstep of that iron crag ;
Thence mark'd the black hull moving yet, and cried,
'He passes to be King among the dead,
And after healing of his grievous wound 450
He comes again ; but — if he comes no more —
O me, be yon dark Queens in yon black boat,
Who shriek'd and wail'd, the three whereat we gazed
On that high day, when, clothed with living light,
They stood before his throne in silence, friends 455
Of Arthur, who should help him at his need ?'

Then from the dawn it seem'd there came, but faint
As from beyond the limit of the world,

Like the last echo born of a great cry,
Sounds, as if some fair city were one voice 460
Around a king returning from his wars.

Thereat once more he moved about, and clomb
Even to the highest he could climb, and saw,
Straining his eyes beneath an arch of hand,
Or thought he saw, the speck that bare the King, 465
Down that long water opening on the deep
Somewhere far off, pass on and on, and go
From less to less and vanish into light.
And the new sun rose bringing the new year.

NOTES.

NUMBERS REFER TO LINES.

THE COMING OF ARTHUR.

THIS Idyll, it will be remembered, was not first, but at least sixth, in actual order of composition. It is clear that Tennyson made use of it to assemble some loose threads of the Arthurian fabric, which he had now pretty well completed in his mind. His version of the narrative is, as has been suggested in the Introduction to this edition, very different from that of Malory. It is less simple, straightforward, and mediæval, more mystical, ideal, and modern. It omits important incidents given in *Le Morte Darthur*, and introduces altogether new ones. For instance, it makes Arthur's marriage of far greater account to Arthur's spiritual life than does Malory, and of less account to his career; for, according to the old narrative, the Round Table itself and many of the knights came as Guinevere's dower. Tennyson also frequently changes the order of events.

Here is the substance of Malory's account of Arthur's marriage (Book I, chaps. xvii and xviii, and Book III, chaps. i, ii, and v):—

“Then there came word that the King Rience of North Wales made great war on King Leodegrance of Camelard, for the which thing Arthur was wroth, for he loved him well, and hated King Rience, for he was always against him. . . . And then King Arthur, and King Ban, and King Bors departed with their fellowship, a twenty thousand, and came within six days into the country of Camelard, and there rescued King Leodegrance, and slew there much people of King Rience, unto the number of ten thousand men, and put them to flight. And then had these three kings great cheer of King Leodegrance, that thanked them of their great goodness, that they could revenge him of his enemies; and there had Arthur the first sight of Guenever, the

king's daughter of Cameliard, and ever after he loved her. After they were wedded, as it telleth in the book."

It was some time after, by Malory's account, that the wedding took place. The rest of the first Book and all of the second are occupied with adventures of various sorts. Then, at the beginning of Book III:—

"In the beginning of Arthur, after he was chosen king by adventure and by grace; for the most part of the barons knew not that he was Uther Pendragon's son, but as Merlin made it openly known. But yet many kings and lords held great war against him for that cause, but well Arthur overcame them all, for the most part the days of his life he was ruled much by the counsel of Merlin. So it fell on a time King Arthur said unto Merlin, My barons will let me have no rest, but needs I must take a wife, and I will now take but by thy counsel and thine advice. It is well done, said Merlin, that ye take a wife, for a man of your bounty and noblesse should not be without a wife. Now is there any that ye love more than another? Yea, said King Arthur, I love Guenever the king's daughter, Leodegrance of the land of Camelhard, the which holdeth in his house the Table Round that ye told he had of my father Uther. And this damosel is the most valiant and fairest lady that I know living, or yet that ever I could find. Sir, said Merlin, as of her beauty and fairness she is one of the fairest alive, but, an ye loved her not so well as ye do, I should find you a damosel of beauty and of goodness that should like you and please you, an your heart were not set; but then as a man's heart is set, he will be loath to return. That is truth, said King Arthur. But Merlin warned the king covertly that Guenever was not wholesome for him to take to wife, for he warned him that Lancelot should love her, and she him again; and so he turned his tale to the adventures of Sangreal. Then Merlin desired of the king for to have men with him that should enquire of Guenever, and so the king granted him, and Merlin went forth unto King Leodegrance of Cameliard, and told him of the desire of the king that he would have unto his wife Guenever his daughter. That is to me, said King Leodegrance, the best tidings that ever I heard, that so worthy a king of prowess and noblesse will wed my daughter. And as for my lands, I will give him, wist I it might please him, but he hath lands enow, him needeth none, but I shall send him a gift shall please him much more, for I shall give him the Table Round, the which Uther Pendragon gave me, and when it is full complete, then is an hundred knights and fifty. And as for an hundred

good knights I have myself, but I faute fifty, for so many have been slain in my days. And so Leodegrance delivered his daughter Guenever unto Merlin, and the Table Round with the hundred knights, and so they rode freshly, with great royalty, what by water and what by land, till that they came nigh unto London. . . . When King Arthur heard of the coming of Guenever and the hundred knights with the Table Round, then King Arthur made great joy for her coming, and that rich present, and said openly, This fair lady is passing welcome unto me, for I have loved her long, and therefore there is nothing so lief to me. And these knights with the Round Table please me more than great riches. And in all haste the king let ordain for the marriage and the coronation, in the most honorable wise that could be devised. . . . Then was the high feast made ready, and the king was wedded at Camelot unto Dame Guenever in the church of Saint Stephen's, with great solemnity."

8. the heathen host : the Saxons or Danes.

13. Aurelius : the older brother and predecessor of Uther Pendragon, who was the father of Arthur.

36. This probably means the Picts and Scots.

38-40. And on the spike, etc. : these lines have been often cited as an example of Tennyson's use of alliteration and assonance.

46. Arthur yet had done no deed : according to Malory, Arthur's fame as a warrior was secure before he fought for Leodegrance.

50. The golden symbol : this probably alludes to the golden dragon which Uther had chosen for his standard, and from which the "Pendragon" was derived.

72. Gorloïs : called by Malory simply the Duke of Tintagil ; the first husband of Igraine (Ygerne), mother of Arthur.

73. Anton : called by Malory Sir Ector, whose wife nursed Arthur in infancy.

103. The long-lanced battle let their horses run : how would this be put in prose ?

124. his warrior whom he loved : see line 446, page 15.

146. Arthur's birth : as will be seen from the passage quoted above, Malory's Leodegrance makes no question of Arthur's birth. The story of his birth occupies the two opening chapters of *Le Morte Darthur*.

152. Bleys (or Blaise) had been Merlin's teacher, and became his chronicler.

208. that same night: according to Malory, Arthur was some two years old when Uther on his death-bed proclaimed him his heir. Arthur was nevertheless obliged to prove his birth by submitting to a test of which it is somewhat strange that Tennyson made no use. (See Malory, Book I, chap. v.) Later (chap. viii), Merlin testifies to his legitimacy.

243. In *Le Morte Darthur* **Modred** becomes the instrument of Fate, to Arthur's undoing.

275. three fair queens: said to represent Faith, Hope, and Charity. They are Tennyson's own creations.

294. In Malory, it is considerably later that Arthur gets **Excalibur** (Book I, chap. xxv).

504. The slowly-fading mistress: when did the Romans leave Britain?

517. twelve great battles: See *Lancelot and Elaine*, 286-303.

GARETH AND LYNETTE.

Tennyson follows Malory very closely in this Idyll. The story constitutes one of the longest of the episodes in *Le Morte Darthur*, occupying the whole of Book VII.

1. Lot and Bellicent: of Orkney. Bellicent was the mother of Modred, or Mordred, who is the villain of the Arthurian legend. Gawain, already a knight of the Round Table, was another son. The peculiarity of Malory's version is simply that Gareth, who is called by the nickname Beaumains, given him by Sir Kay, does not actually serve in the kitchen, but does remain a pensioner for a year and a day.

3. spate: torrent, or "freshet"; a Scottish word, often used by Burns.

18. Heaven yield her for it: Old English "yielden," to pay. See *Hamlet*, Act IV, Scene iv, 41.

46. Book of Hours: a prayer-book illuminated in colors and gilt, with initials, lines, and pictures, and containing the prayers prescribed for the seven hours during which the church orders these prayers to be said. — **VLIMEN**.

185. Camelot: a prose sketch was found among Tennyson's papers, which gave this description of Arthur's capital city: "On the latest limit of the West, in the land of Lyonesse, where save the rocky Isles of Scilly all is now wild sea, rose the sacred Mount of Camelot. It rose from the deeps, with gardens and bowers and palaces, and at the top of the mount was King Arthur's hall and the holy minster with the cross of gold."

229. boughts: folds.

369-370. King Arthur is in Malory a very human figure. This is one of the few passages in Tennyson's version of the legend which gives a similar impression of him.

431. Last, Gareth leaning both hands heavily, etc.: this is the point at which Malory's story of Gareth begins:—

"Right so came into the hall two men well beseen and richly, and upon their shoulders there leaned the goodliest young man and the fairest that ever they all saw, and he was large and long and broad in the shoulders, and well visaged, and the fairest and the largest handed that ever man saw, but he fared as though he might not go nor bear himself but he leaned upon their shoulders. . . . Then this much young man pulled himself aback, and easily stretched up straight, saying, King Arthur, God you bless and all your fair fellowship, and in especial the fellowship of the Table Round. And for this cause I am come hither, to pray you and require you to give me three gifts, and they shall not be unreasonably asked, but that ye may worshipfully and honourably grant them me, and to you no great hurt nor loss. And the first done and gift I will ask now, and the other two gifts I will ask this day twelvemonth, wheresomever ye hold your high feast. Now ask, said Arthur, and ye shall have your asking. Now, sir, this is my petition for this feast, that ye will give me meat and drink sufficiently for this twelvemonth, and at that day I will ask mine other two gifts. My fair son, said Arthur, ask better, for this is but a simple asking; for my heart giveth me to thee greatly, that thou art come of men of worship, and greatly my conceit faileth me but thou shalt prove a man of right great worship. Sir, said he, thereof be as it may be, I have asked that I will ask. Well, said the king, ye shall have meat and drink enough; I never defended that none, neither my friend nor my foe. But what is thy name I would wit? I cannot tell you, said he. That is marvel, said the king, that thou knowest not thy name, and thou art the goodliest young man one that

ever I saw. Then the king betook him to Sir Kay the steward, and charged him that he should give him of all manner of meats and drinks of the best, and also that he had no manner of finding as though he were a lord's son. That shall little need, said Sir Kay, to do such cost upon him; for I dare undertake he is a villain born, and never will make man, for an he had come of gentlemen he would have asked of you horse and armor, but such as he is, such he asketh. And sithen he hath no name, I shall give him a name that shall be Beaumains, that is Fair-hands, and into the kitchen I shall bring him, and there he shall have fat brose every day, that he shall be as fat by the twelvemonth's end as a pork hog. Right so the two men departed and beleft him to Sir Kay, that scorned him and mocked him."

507-509. So there were any trial of mastery, etc.: "And where there were any masteries done, thereat would he be, and there might none cast bar nor stone to him by two yards." — Malory, Book VII, chap. ii.

528. Peter's knee: what does this mean?

573-649. In Malory's narrative there is no preliminary interview between Arthur and Gareth before the coming of Lynette: —

"So it passed on till the feast of Whitsuntide, and at that time the king held it at Carlion in the most royallest wise, like as he did yearly. But the king would no meat eat upon the Whitsunday, until he heard some adventures. Then came there a squire to the king, and said, Sir, ye may go to your meat, for here cometh a damosel with some strange adventures. Then was the king glad and sat him down. Right so there came a damosel into the hall, and saluted the king, and prayed him of succour" (Book VII, chap. ii). The "damosel" then tells him what the "adventure" is to be, and asks for a champion, though she does not speak of Sir Launcelot. "With these words came before the king Beaumains, while the damosel was there, and thus he said: Sir King, God thank you I have been this twelvemonth in your kitchen, and have had my full sustenance, and now I will ask my two gifts that be behind. Ask, upon my peril, said the king. Sir, this shall be my two gifts, first that ye will grant me to have this adventure of the damosel, for it belongeth unto me. Thou shalt have it, said the king, I grant it thee. Then, sir, this is the other gift, that ye shall bid Launcelot du Lake to make me knight, for of him I will be made knight and else of none. And when I am passed, I pray you let him ride after me, and make me knight when I require him. All

this shall be done, said the king. Fie on thee, said the damosel, shall I have none but one that is your kitchen page? Then was she wroth and took her horse and departed."

647. slope street: cf. Milton's *Comus*, 98.

662-674. According to Malory, a dwarf appears with the horse and trappings; "thereat all the court had much marvel from whence came all that gear."

690-718. "Then Sir Kay," says Malory, "said all open in the hall, I will ride after my boy in the kitchen, to wit whether he will know me for his better. Said Sir Launcelot and Sir Gawaine, Yet abide at home. So Sir Kay made him ready, and took his horse and his spear, and rode after him."

729. agaric: a kind of mushroom.

734-740. By Malory's account, Sir Kay comes up with Gareth as soon as he has overtaken the "damosel." Kay is overthrown, and Gareth challenges a knight, who has stood by watching, to joust. They have a long bout, which issues in a draw; the knight declares himself Lancelot, and dubs Gareth knight, who thereupon overtakes the "damosel" a second time. "When he had overtaken the damosel, anon she said, What dost thou here? . . . Weenest thou, said she, that I allow thee, for yonder knight that thou killest? Nay, truly, for thou slewest him unhappily and cowardly; therefore turn again, kitchen page, I know thee well, for Sir Kay named thee Beaumains. What art thou but a luske [lout] and a turner of broaches and a ladle-washer? Damosel, said Beaumains, say to me what ye will, I will not go from you whatsoever ye say, for I have undertaken to King Arthur for to achieve your adventure, and so shall I finish it to the end, either I shall die therefore. . . . I shall assay, said Beaumains."

804. wan: evidently not "pale." Look up the older meaning.

832-851. "Fie, fie, said she. Sir Knight, ye are uncourteous to set a kitchen page afore me; him beseemeth better to stick a swine than to sit afore a damosel of high parage. Then the knight was ashamed at her words, and took him up, and set him at a sideboard, and set himself afore him, and so all that night they had good cheer and merry rest."

935. avoid: the older use of the word.

968-969. In Malory there is no such immediate softening of the tormentor toward her victim as Tennyson describes; and the series of combats are more sanguinary and less romantic.

1184. error : used in its literal sense.

1185-1189. As has been shown, Malory places the meeting of Gareth and Lancelot at the beginning of the adventure. Thereafter follow the combats with the three brothers, the Black Knight, the Green Knight, and the Red Knight.

1373-1385. This incident has no place in Malory.

1392. he that told the tale : Tennyson, of course, means Malory, who makes Gareth, before he finally gains the hand of "the lady Lionesse," win an open tournament in which most of the knights of the Round Table take part. Lynette (or Linet) turns out to be something of an enchantress, and not at all in love with Gareth.

LANCELOT AND ELAINE.

Tennyson begins the tale more artfully than Malory, with the statement of Elaine's possession of the shield ; then follows an explanation of the manner in which it came into her hands.

8-12. This passage strikingly illustrates the difference between Tennyson's poetic diction, and ordinary speech. To substitute simpler phraseology for such words as *soilure*, *braided*, *devices*, *blazon'd*, *tinct*, *wit*, and *border fantasy*, would be to destroy what is characteristic in the description. At the same time the student should be sure of the exact meaning of the text.

23. Camelot : see *Gareth and Lynette*, 296-302.

27. fantasy : why does Tennyson prefer this form to "fancy" ? See line 71, page 67.

31. For the great diamond. etc. : according to Malory, Arthur does, at another time, offer a diamond as a prize ; but it has no especial importance such as is given it here. The romantic story of Arthur's finding of the diamond is of Tennyson's invention.

67. still : used in the older sense.

76. this world's hugest : London.

94. lets : in modern usage the word has retained this meaning only in connection with the game of tennis.

158-205. "And so upon the morn early Sir Launcelot heard mass and brake his fast, and so took his leave of the queen and departed. And then he rode so much till he came to Astolat, that is Guildford; and there it happed him in the eventide he came to an old baron's place that hight Sir Bernard of Astolat. . . . So when Sir

Launcelot was in his lodging, and unarmed him in his chamber, the old baron and hermit came to him making his reverence, and welcomed him in the best manner ; but the old knight knew not Sir Launcelot. Fair sir, said Sir Launcelot to his host, I would pray you to lend me a shield that were not openly known, for mine is well known. Sir, said his host, ye shall have your desire, for meseemeth ye be one of the likeliest knights of the world, and therefore I shall show you friendship. Sir, wit you well I have two sons that were but late made knights, and the eldest hight Sir Tirre, and he was hurt that same day he was made knight, that he may not ride, and his shield ye shall have, for that is not known I dare say but here, and in no place else. And my youngest son hight Lawaine, and if it please you, he shall ride with you unto that jousts ; and he is of his age strong and wight."

279. Badon hill : a battle in which the West Saxons were defeated by the Britons.

297. the wild white Horse : the white horse was the symbol of the Saxons.

310-311. nor cares for triumph : Malory gives a different account of Arthur ; he represents him as fond of winning in the jousts and quite humanly jealous of Lancelot's superiority.

314. the fire of God : see *The Coming of Arthur*, line 127.

338. rathe : we have a modification of this word in common use, "rather."

341. Down the long tower-stairs, hesitating : this line illustrates Tennyson's freedom in the use of blank verse. Can it be scanned ?

355-375. This passage amounts almost to a paraphrase of Malory, Book XVIII, chap. ix.

468-473. "O mercy Jesu, said Sir Gawaine, what knight is that knight yonder that doth so marvellous deeds of arms in that field ? I wot well what he is, said King Arthur, but as at this time I will not name him. Sir, said Sir Gawaine, I would say it were Sir Launcelot by his riding and his buffets that I see him deal, but ever meseemeth it should not be he for that he beareth the red sleeve upon his head, for I wist him never bear token at no jousts of lady nor gentlewoman." — Malory, Book XVIII, chap. xi.

513-516. "And forthwith Sir Lavaine drew the truncheon out of his side, and he gave great shriek and a marvellous grisly groan, and the blood burst out nigh a pint at once, that at the last he sank down, and so swooned pale and deadly. . . . And then with great pain Sir

Lavaine halp him upon his horse. And then they rode a great wallop together, and ever Sir Launcelot bled that it ran down to the earth; and so by fortune they came to that hermitage the which was under a wood, and a great cliff on the other side, and a fair water running under it." — Malory, Book XVIII, chap. xiii.

592. What is the force of **fine** here ?

783-792. "So as fair Elaine came to Winchester she sought there all about, and by fortune Sir Lavaine was ridden to play him, to enchafe his horse. And anon as Elaine saw him she knew him, and then she cried aloud until him. And when he heard her anon he came to her, and then she asked her brother how did my lord, Sir Launcelot ? Who told you, sister, that my lord's name was Sir Launcelot ? Then she told him how Gawaine by his shield knew him." — Malory, Book XVIII, chap. xv.

929. "For wit ye will, fair maiden, I might have married an I had would, but I never applied me to be married yet." — Malory, Book XVIII, chap. xix.

939. **quit**: what does this mean ?

1092. "So when she had thus endured a ten days, that she fretted so that she must needs pass out of this world, then she shrived her clean, and received her Creator." — Malory, Book XVIII, chap. xix.

1109-1122. "And while my body is hot let this letter be put in my right hand; and my hand bound fast with the letter until that I be cold; and let me be put in a fair bed with all the richest clothes that I have about me, and so let my bed and all my richest clothes be laid with me in a chariot unto the next place where Thames is; and there let me be put within a barget, and but one man with me, such as ye trust to steer me thither, and that my barget be covered with black samite over and over; thus father I beseech you let it be done." — Malory, Book XVIII, chap. xix.

1264-1274. "Then the king brake it, and made a clerk to read it, and this was the intent of the letter: Most Noble Knight, Sir Launcelot, now hath death made us two at debate for your love. I was your lover that men called the Fair Maiden of Astolat; therefore unto all ladies I make my moan, yet pray for my soul, and bury me at least, and offer ye my mass-penny: this is my last request. . . . Pray for my soul, Sir Launcelot, as thou art peerless." — Malory, Book XVIII, chap. xx.

1346. What does **affiance** mean here ?

1418. **he should die a holy man**: Lancelot became a priest, and Guinevere an abbess.

THE PASSING OF ARTHUR.

IN the poem *Morte d'Arthur*, published in 1842, Tennyson produced an earlier version of this Idyll. The passage in Malory upon which the poem is mainly based must be given entire:—

“Therefore, said Arthur [unto Sir Bedivere], take thou Excalibur, my good sword, and go with it to yonder water side, and when thou comest there, I charge thee throw my sword in that water, and come again, and tell me what thou there seest. My lord, said Bedivere, your commandment shall be done, and lightly bring you word again. So Sir Bedivere departed, and by the way he beheld that noble sword, that the pommel and the haft was all of precious stones, and then he said to himself, if I throw this rich sword in the water, thereof shall never come good, but harm and loss. And then Sir Bedivere hid Excalibur under a tree. And so as soon as he might he came again unto the king, and said he had been at the water, and had thrown the sword into the water. What saw thou there? said the king. Sir, he said, I saw nothing but waves and winds. That is untruly said of thee, said the king; therefore go thou lightly again, and do my commandment; as thou art to me lief and dear, spare not, but throw it in. Then Sir Bedivere returned again, and took the sword in his hand; and then him thought sin and shame to throw away that noble sword; and so eft he hid the sword, and returned again, and told to the king that he had been at the water, and done his commandment. What saw thou there? said the king. Sir, he said, I saw nothing but the waters wappe and the waves wanne. Ah traitor, untrue, said king Arthur, now hast thou betrayed me twice. Who would have weened that thou that hast been to me so lief and dear, and thou art named a noble knight, and would betray me for the richness of the sword. But now go again lightly, for thy long tarrying putteth me in great jeopardy of my life, for I have taken cold. And but if thou do now as I bid thee, if ever I may see thee, I shall slay thee with mine own hands, for thou wouldst for my rich sword see me dead. Then Sir Bedivere departed, and went to the sword, and lightly took it up, and went to the water side, and there he bound the girdle about the hilts, and then he threw the sword as far into the water as he might, and there came an arm and an hand above the water, and met it, and caught it, and so shook it thrice and brandished, and then vanished

away the hand with the sword in the water. So Sir Bedivere came again to the king, and told him what he saw. Alas, said the king, help me hence, for I dread me I have tarried over long. Then Sir Bedivere took the king upon his back, and so went with him to that water side. And when they were at the water side, even fast by the bank hove a little barge, with many fair ladies in it, and among them all was a queen, and all they had black hoods, and all they wept and shrieked when they saw king Arthur. Now put me into the barge, said the king : and so he did softly ; and there received him three queens with great mourning ; and so they set them down. . . . Then Sir Bedivere cried : Ah my lord Arthur, what shall become of me, now ye go from me and leave me here alone among mine enemies ? Comfort thyself, said the king, and do as well as thou mayest, for in me is no trust for to trust in ; for I will into the vale of Avilion to heal me of my grievous wound ; and if thou hear never more of me, pray for my soul. But ever the queens and ladies wept and shrieked, that it was pity to hear. And as soon as Sir Bedivere had lost the sight of the barge, he wept and wailed, and so took the forest." — Malory, Book XXI, chap. v.

34. According to Malory, Gawain means his message for warning rather than for prophecy : " God hath sent me to you of his special grace, to give you warning that in no wise ye do battle us to-morn, but that ye take a treaty for a month day ; and proffer you largely, so as to-morn to be put in a delay. For within a month shall come Sir Launcelot with all his noble Knights, and rescue you worshipfully, and slay Sir Modred, and all that ever will hold with him " (Malory, Book XXI, chap. iii). In consequence Arthur tries to put off the struggle, and a truce is arranged with Mordred ; but an accident brings the battle on, and Arthur is fatally wounded.

70. And shook him thro' the north : see *The Coming of Arthur*, line 511.

77. One lying in the dust at Almesbury : see *Guinevere*. At Almesbury occurred the final interview between the King and Guinevere, and there, according to Malory, she became nun, and finally Abbess.

81. Lyonesse : the ancient land of Lyonesse lay, according to fable, between Cornwall and the Scilly Islands.

105-110. Notice the irregular metrical structure of these lines. Can they be scanned ?

156. Malory gives a very different account of the relationship between Arthur and Mordred. Upon that relationship hangs the tragic motive of *Le Morte Darthur*, and not upon the episode of Launcelot and Guinevere.

164-169. In Malory, the battle is one of extermination. Arthur, Sir Bedivere, Sir Lucan, and Mordred are presently the only survivors. Sir Bedivere, remembering the warning of Gawain's ghost, tries to keep Arthur from attacking Mordred: "Tide me death, betide me life, saith the King, now I see him yonder alone he shall never escape mine hands, for at a better avail shall I never have him. God speed you well, said Sir Bedivere. Then the King gat his spear in both his hands, and ran toward Sir Mordred, crying: Traitor, now is thy death-day come. And when Sir Mordred heard Sir Arthur, he ran until him with his sword drawn in his hand. And there King Arthur smote Sir Mordred under the shield, with a foin of his spear, throughout the body, more than a fathom. And when Sir Mordred felt that he had his death wound he thrust himself with the might that he had up to the bur of King Arthur's spear. And right so he smote Arthur, with his sword holden in both his hands, on the side of the head, that the sword pierced the helmet and the brain-pan, and therewithal Sir Mordred fell stark dead to the earth; and the noble Arthur fell in a swoon to the earth, and there he swooned oft times." — Malory, Book XXI, chap. iv.

293. Offices: in the derivative sense.

403. an image of the mighty world: the Round Table was famed to have been made by Merlin as a symbol of the "world," or universe.

453. the three: see *The Coming of Arthur*, lines 275-278.

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